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Biracial identity: more than just Black and White

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This article draws on the insights of research on nine Indian-White biracial young adults to consider how they interpret their social reality. Life-history research was used to discover the complexities that make up the participants' everyday lives and to understand what they believe about themselves. The key findings reveal that the participants' struggles with identity indicate the complexity of identity, but those struggles are not always related to race. Their descriptions of their identity formation reveal an ongoing dialectical process that involved the making of choices amongst various social identities as they moved from one circumstance to another.

Tweerassige identiteit: meer as net swart en wit

Die artikel is gebaseer op die navorsingsinsigte verkry van nege Indiër-Blank tweerassige jong volwassenes in terme van hoe hulle hul sosiale werklikheid interpreteer. Lewensgeskiedenisnavorsing is gebruik om die kompleksiteit van hul daaglikse lewe te ontdek en om te verstaan wat hul oor hulself glo. Die sleutelbevindinge toon aan dat die nege deelnemers met aspekte rakende hul identiteit worstel en dit dui op die kompleksiteit van laasgenoemde en dat sulke worstelinge nie altyd verband hou met ras nie. Die beskrywinge van hul identiteitsvorming openbaar 'n voortdurende dialektiese proses wat die maak van keuses vanuit verskillende sosiale identiteite insluit soos hulle van een situasie na 'n volgende beweeg.

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It was my son Cameron's 7th birthday and we had invited ten of his friends to enjoy his favourite pancake meal at home. Later, as parents of the seven-year-old guests arrived to fetch their children, one of them mentioned to Emma, my partner, and me that her son had asked her "what was Cameron?" When she saw that Emma and I seemed confused by the question, she framed it differently and continued that she did not know whether to answer "Indian-White, mixed-rac e person or Coloured". All the descriptors she offered were linked to race and none made reference to other social identities, such as Christian, Hindu, boy, South African or simply a seven-year-old who loves pancakes. The racial references may have been triggered by the fact that Emma is White and I am Indian. When Emma asked the woman if it mattered what racial descriptor was used for Cameron, she gingerly alerted us to the possible identity confusion and pain that children of interracial unions experience.

I do not believe that this woman is alone in making these assumptions, as these have informed much of the literature on biracial identity. Funderburg (1994: 10) writes

> [f]or as long as blacks and whites have chosen to settle down and marry, they have been confronted with the question: But what about the children?

The implication is that the racial divide between White and Black is vast and unbridgeable and, therefore, that mixed race children, because of their ambiguous social position, will automatically have identity problems (cf Funderburg 1994, Kahn & Denmon 1997, Wilson 1987). There are at least two possible implied positions in this view — the one is that their biological status of "race mix" leads to problems; and the other is that society will make it problematic for the child, as the parent of the seven-year-old inadvertently implied. In various ways, many assumptions are made about biracial individuals without any reference to what they themselves think, feel and experience, and one could rightfully interrogate the quality of research on which they were based. I believe that this is where my exploratory study adds to the small body of South African literature on this topic. At the heart of my study is an exploration of how a select group of nine Indian-White biracial young adults interpret

their social reality, especially with regard to their understanding and experience of racial identity.

1. Talk about race

Most South Africans describe their race in terms of the fixed racial categories which were legislatively assigned in the apartheid era, namely, African, Indian, White and Coloured (cf Posel 2001, Singh 1997, Zegeye 2001). These racialised identities are deeply embedded in the South African social structure and remain part of the nomenclature of the post-apartheid system (Posel 2001). I understand that to talk about race and racial categories, such as mixed race, interracial, 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). It is always 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, that 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 of 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 (cf Francis 2006 & 2007).

The term "biracial" is used in the USA to refer to people who have parents from two socially defined races. In South Africa, Blankenberg (2000), Morral (1994), Ledderboge (1996) and Maré (2005) have used "biracial" to refer to children of interracial unions. The term "biracial", however, is perplexing because it implies that an individual has two halves, in this particular case, one Indian and one White. I am not suggesting that an individual can be divided into halves or can fall "in the middle" between two identities. Nor am I suggesting that there are black and white races and that there is a space between

these called biracial. "Biracial" is a category of race just as Coloured, African, Chinese, and Indian are constructed. Given the myriad possible combinations of different racial groups, the "biracial" category is indeed diverse and can comprise Indian-African, White-African, Chinese-Indian, and so on, and thus differ significantly in terms of appearance, cultural practices, and life experiences (Wijeyesinghe 1992). South African research on interracial relationships (Morral 1994, Ratele 2002) and transracial adoptions (Ledderbogge 1996, Miller 1999) have explored, albeit indirectly, the notion of biracialism. Morral (1994), Ledderboge (1996), Miller (1999) and Ratele (2002), based on participant responses in their research studies, reported that there is a perception that children of interracial unions will be born into a racial netherworld or marginal situation.

2. The literature

The term "marginal" has become a convenient shorthand to describe any person "who does not fit into the mainstream mould and who, for whatever reason, straddles two or more conflicting social identities" (Wilson 1987: 37). Marginality theorists, Park (1950) and Stonequist (1937), suggest that individuals who were caught between two conflicting social groups were particularly prone to feelings of social unease, divided loyalty and psychological distress. Park (1950: 370), for example, suggested that people of mixed race origin could not claim full membership to either the black or white race and thus were "divided selves". This was said to intensify "self-consciousness, restlessness and [. . .] psychological malaise" which was internalised and experienced as an identity crisis. Thus says Park (1928: 881) charitably, while the marginal man (*sic*) lives a "fate, which condemns him to live, at the same time, in two worlds" his situation need not be entirely negative. He can have insight into the workings of two social groups, which he could use to his advantage if he can "look with a certain degree of critical detachment".

Unlike Park, Stonequist (1937: 8) described the marginal person as "poised in psychological uncertainty between two or more social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds [. . .]". He writes of the "racial hybrid"

as the "most obvious" type of marginal man who "will be ambivalent in attitudes and sentiments, have divided loyalty, be irrational, moody, and temperamental" (Stonequist 1937: 201). Stonequist even suggests a three-part life cycle in marginality. In the first part, childhood, the person of mixed-race origin is unaware of his marginal situation. In the second part, proceeding to adolescence, the marginal man experiences a crisis of rejection as he becomes aware of his mixed race and marginal identity because he does not belong to the White group. In the third part, adulthood, he attains some sense of "adjustment" by assimilating himself into the "dominant" society where he can pass as White. Alternatively, he will become absorbed into the Black group where he will have overcome negative feelings towards Black people. Stonequist (1937: 138) concluded that mixed race individuals who choose to remain marginal by resisting assimilation into either group would experience despair.

Dickie-Clark (1966), a South African sociologist, challenged Park and Stonequist's view of marginality by suggesting that they had confused the concept of marginality by failing to make a clear distinction between marginal situation, marginal person, and marginal personality. Dickie-Clark (1966: 10) argued that the mere fact of being in a marginal situation does not lead to a marginal personality. While Stonequist (1937) assumed that having the characteristics of more than one group meant that one was both in a marginal situation and had a marginal personality, Dickie-Clark (1966: 10) argued that it was possible to be in a marginal situation, and to negotiate the attitudes one encountered accordingly, without necessarily being deeply affected in one's personality.

In discussing the theories of Park (1937 & 1950), Stonequist (1937) and Dickie-Clark (1966), one could argue that their works are over 40 years in the past and therefore their theories would be irrelevant to understanding how a group of biracial young adults experience identity in 2006. I can understand this trope. However, I have argued that a number of assumptions are still made about biracial individuals, many of which reflect the theories posited by Park and Stonequist. It is on this basis that I draw on the theories of Park (1928 & 1950), Stonequist (1937) and Dickie-Clark (1966), as I believe

they still represent popular thinking, even if not inform such thinking, on whether it is the biological status of "race mix" that leads to problems, or whether it is society that makes it problematic for the individuals who describe themselves as being of mixed race.

More recent studies provide an alternative perspective which refutes Stonequist's (1937: 8-37) argument that mixed-race children have "identity problems" and "no sense of who they are or where they belong". For example, Wilson's (1987) study of a group of 51 Afro-Caribbean-White mixed-race children between the ages of six and nine in Britain reported that "mixed-race children do not necessarily conform to the stereotype of the social misfit, caught between the social worlds of Black and White". Wilson (1987: 199) concluded that it would be "outmoded" to suggest that the children would necessarily be "racked by malaise", "confused" or "psychologically maladjusted".

In another study designed to compare the social adjustment of biracial adolescents in the USA, Cauce *et al* (1992) compared a group of Black-White biracial adolescents with a monoracial control group. Cauce *et al* (1992: 217-8) concluded that biracial adolescents did not differ from the comparison group on any qualitative aspects of family and peer relations (eg, support trust, alienation) and that there were no significant differences between the groups in terms of life stress, behaviour problems, psychological distress or poorer competence and self-worth. Similarly, participants in Gibbs & Hines' (1992: 230-1) two-year study of twelve African American-White adolescents and their families in California reported that they liked their "appearance, being different and unique and [...able] to fit in with all groups". They had difficulty though being "targets of racial slurs, being questioned about their appearance, their parents, and whether they were black or white [... but had] good relations with peers and classmates [... and had established] positive relationships with black, white and mixed race people" (Gibbs & Hines 1992: 232).

Tizard & Phoenix (1993: 65) explored the racial identities of 60 young people of mixed parentage. The participants regarded their mixed-race identity as an asset, to a degree that was not possible in the past. Tizard & Phoenix (1993) attribute this finding to changed societal attitudes to mixed marriages, the rise of Black

youth cultures, admiration from sectors of White youth, and the anti-racist ethos in London Schools. The researchers conclude that the "great majority of the sample did not experience the feelings of social isolation and rejection by both black and white groups" (Tizard & Phoenix 1993: 86).

Recent research takes the view that on the whole biracial children, adolescents and young adults are not social misfits caught between the social worlds of Black and White, nor are they obsessed or burdened with working out issues related to their racial identity. What such studies (cf Wilson 1987, Cauce *et al* 1992, Gibbs & Hines 1992, Tizard & Phoenix 1993) bring to the fore is that biracial individuals do not experience identity in terms of a progression of stages, nor do they report confusion or maladjustment as hypothesised by earlier theorists such as Park (1950 & 1928) and Stonequist (1937). This does not mean that biracial individuals do not experience personal difficulties, rather that clinical studies (cf Gibbs 1987, Kahn & Denmon 1997, Logan *et al* 1987) in this area generally report that individuals experiencing problems come for treatment not because they are biracial, but because of other related factors.

3. The present study

I used the life-history method of data collection 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 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. I assumed that by asking the participants to tell me stories of their lives I would have gained access to how biracial young adults interpret their social world and what they believe about themselves. I began my article with a story from my life, to allow you, the reader, to gain access to my social world. From a quick glimpse you would have read that I have self-identified as an Indian heterosexual father. From reading between the lines you may have also gathered that I am possibly Hindu or Christian, and a South African. It is against this background that I approached nine Indian-White biracial young

adults (18-21) to tell me stories of how they interpret their social reality, especially with regard to their experience of identity. I asked the participants to tell me their life histories in three in-depth interviews. Each interview lasted approximately ninety minutes. An interview guide was used to prompt respondents. The interviews were audiotaped and written transcripts were prepared of each interview. I conducted all the interviews. Other issues discussed during the interviews, not reported in this article, included what racial identities Indian-White biracial young adults chose to identify with; how their racial identities were constructed and experienced; and what the factors were that influenced their choice of racial identities (cf Francis 2006 & 2005).

I used the following criteria in selecting the participants. First, 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 imposed a specific racial grouping and therefore a formal identity on an individual, effectively shaping their life story through this classification (Reddy 2001: 74). As the Population Registration Act was repealed only in 1991, parents of the 18-21-year-old biracial participants would have been racially classified as this formed the basis of the National Party's policy of separate development. Secondly, participants were young adults. I have specifically chosen participants who are 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 are now full of plans and choices for mapping out their futures. Interracial families and biracial young adults were identified through schools, universities, and religious, sporting and social service organisations in the Ethekweni Metro area. In no way can the nine participants be seen as representative of Indian-White biracial young adults living in the region. Out of the 12 identified as Indian-White biracial young adults between the ages of 18-21, only nine were willing and able to participate. Table 1 reflects some characteristics of the final sample.

Table 1: Summary of participants

Name	Gender	Age	Class*	Race# of mother	Race# of father
1. Kerry	Female	18	Working	Indian	White
2. Ishmael	Male	21	Upper Middle	White	Indian
3. Natalie	Female	21	Upper Middle	White	Indian
4.Dayallan	Male	21	Working	White	Indian
5. Mayuri	Female	19	Upper Middle	Indian	White
6. Daniel	Male	21	Upper Middle	Indian	White
7. Prashantha	Female	20	Middle	Indian	White
8. Marlon	Male	20	Working	Indian	White
9. Nicole	Female	20	Working	Indian	White

*Named by participant
#Named by Population Registration Act

All nine participants received a clear explanation of the expected tasks in which they would be expected to participate, enabling them to make an informed choice for voluntary participation. They were also informed of the parameters of confidentiality of the information supplied by them, and anonymity. All the names of the participants, references to places and people have been changed for the purpose of confidentiality. The study was approved by the ethics committee at the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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. The analysis involved a cross-case analysis for the purpose of theorising from experiences drawn from the in-depth interviews, theoretical framework, and literature.

4. Discussion

4.1 More than just race

Race, for the nine Indian-White biracial young adults in my study, was not the sole or even the most important consideration in the construction of their identities, even though they had to confront such demands all the time as a contextual given. 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. For example, when the participants talk about religion as an important identity marker, what they are saying is that religion is different from the role played by race and, therefore, largely independent of it. Ishmael, Natalie, Prashantha and Mayuri spoke of religion and faith as being important, if not more important, in their lives than other aspects of their identity. For example, Ishmael stated explicitly,

> On reflection I felt that [my identity as] being a Muslim has been more prominent that any other aspect of my identity. You see I define myself as a Muslim.

For Ishmael, "Islam is a way of life" and he shared a number of experiences, which were centred on his Muslim identity. In similar ways, Mayuri mentioned how religion and not race was often a cause of tension between her boyfriend and herself, and claimed, "I never realised that Catholicism would be so important to me but it is".

For Natalie, religion takes on a different meaning as it is seen as a source of conflict within her home. She argues that it was not her "parents' race that has bothered [her] as much as it's their religious differences". In her life history she makes clear the distinction between race and religion by stating that her parents' arguments were centred on the latter. For Natalie, religion is not viewed as an essentialist version of what race is, in that it often (in the local context) encompasses religion. Of course, this is not true for all the participants. Nicole and Mayuri, who were socialised as Christians, shared their experiences of how they interpreted and participated in the Hindu prayers and rituals when they visited their "Indian relatives". Mayuri tells,

> I did not know what to do but my Indian cousins used to show me how to hold the lamp and what the different prayers were for. Sometimes I would hold the lamp with my cousins and turn it around. I remember that while I would do the [Hindu] rituals I would pray to Jesus, the Christian God.

While the participants do racialise identity in a particular way, it is not crudely done, by linking religion to race in an essentialised way.

The participants' stories reveal a grappling with different aspects of their identity, such as religion, age, class and gender, which

would contribute to a sense of complexity and are not directly linked to race. Their stories indicate clearly that the participants see themselves as more than just racial beings.

4.2 Life cycle in marginality

Earlier in this article, I included Stonequist's (1937: 137) discussion on marginality where he argues that the most difficult time for the biracial individual occurs between adolescence and adulthood when they would endure a "crisis stage". All nine participants in my study are between the ages of 18-21 and according to Stonequist (1937: 137-8) should be experiencing the "feelings of confusion", "guilt and alienation" and "self-hatred as a result of being of mixed race". However, there is a disparity between the life histories of the nine participants and the time-specific stage theories posited by Stonequist. All nine participants spoke about their current experiences and challenges but did not describe "feelings of confusion", "guilt and alienation" and "self-hatred" as a consequence of being of mixed race.

The participants in my study described their identity formation as an ongoing dialectical process that involved the making of choices amongst various social identities as they moved from one circumstance to another. All nine participants spoke about current challenges and issues that were far more significant in their lives than grappling with "having to choose one racial identity that is not fully expressive of one's background" (Stonequist 1937: 138). Marlon, for example, spoke about his newly acquired identity as husband and father and narrates his current dilemmas:

> I feel like I have failed as a man you know, I mean the man has to look after his family and to be the breadwinner and all.

For him, class identity is part of his interactions with the world around him and is something he is always aware of wherever he goes. In the same way, the other eight participants spoke about current challenges:

> Natalie: According to my father that's the ideal of what a woman should be: 'learn how to cook, go do the dancing [...] You remain submissive'. That's his belief. He says to me, 'Natalie, it's a man's world!'

> Nicole: She [mother] would argue that 'a boy can do this and that because he can protect himself' and I'm thinking to myself, 'girls can do the same'. She and I always argue until we are blue in the face.
>
> Daniel: I mean, I'm heterosexual and I also happen to be a man, but being heterosexual doesn't make me more 'manly' than a man who is homosexual.
>
> Natalie: He was a suitable date only because my parents saw him as a Gujarati boy from a similar wealthy class to us. When boys had these two characteristics they were considered good prospects but if they were different my parents had a whole lot of problems.
>
> Mayuri: I wanted to be a chef. They [parents] said, 'You are not allowed to do that. It's not a proper job. There's no degree'.

The diverse, complex and inconsistent ways in which the nine participants made sense of their identity, challenges the usefulness of models such as the ones proposed by Stonequist (1937) which view the racial identity development of biracial individuals as taking place through a progression of stages. In attempting to squash rich and diverse experiences into stage development models, such as the one proposed by Stonequist, much of the meaning that an individual makes of his or her life and sense of identity is diminished. Such approaches to identity overlook other social identities and experiences that may have played a more prominent role in identity construction.

4.3 'Marginal man' and racism

Park (1928) and Stonequist's (1937: 138) argument that the marginal man will experience "feelings of isolation or of not quite belonging" did hold in some instance for the nine participants. It holds in the sense that all nine participants did experience racism similar to the findings reported by Wilson (1987), Cauce *et al* (1992), Gibbs & Hines (1992) and Tizard & Phoenix (1993). What emerges in the nine participants' life histories is that they have learnt positive ways of understanding racial difference and developed creative ways of dealing with racism (Francis 2007). For example, Dayalan recalls coming home from school upset because the other children told him he was not Indian and his grandfather making him feel better:

> He said that we are all one race; and that God made all people in this world and whether you were white or brown or black it did not matter. All that mattered was what colour your heart was.

This helped Dayallan see the good in people, beyond the colour of their skin, and not to allow racist remarks to deter him. This helped him through high school to deal with other racist name-calling. Another participant, Ishmael, used his unique family situation to get his classmates to talk about race. He chose the topic What it is like to be part of a multicultural family? as the topic for his class oral presentation. The discussions after Ishmael had finished helped him dispel the myths that some of his classmates harboured about biracial children and interracial families.

Most of the participants mentioned their irritation at continuously having to answer the question, “What are you?” Mayuri found that by challenging people about the question and asking them to clarify it, it became more obvious that fitting into a racial category was not the only defining point to a person. A certain amount of humour was also present when the participants described people’s frustrations and efforts to classify them. Perhaps the following examples make explicit that marginality was less of an issue for the participants than it was for those who were attempting to classify them. For example, Prashantha mentioned how much amusement she found in confusing people by answering, “I’m half Scottish and half Tamil”. Nicole also found humour a good way of dealing with her classmates’ continuous need to know her race:

> At school everyone’s asking us, ‘What are you?’ It’s like every time you say, ‘no my mother’s Indian and my father’s White’. And they like still [ask], ‘So what are you?’ So I would say, ‘I’m White’. And they say, ‘You can’t be White’. And I would say, ‘no really, we are tanned Whites [...] the sun tanned me. I am a really tanned White person’. I think most were convinced. I even remember some of them saying, ‘I wish I was as tanned as you [...] it’s so unfair that you tan so easily’. And I would say, ‘Oh, it’s just natural’.

The participants do not see their social world as “problematic” or “disorganised” but see their situation as a creative challenge and positive resource.

4.4 Beyond marginal

All of the nine participants in my study have constructed their personal narratives as being stories of minor success and saw advantages in their situation (Francis 2007). Kerry's situation was one which could be envied by others. She felt that being half-Indian, half-White gave her a kind of unique attractiveness that other girls did not have:

> I remember once in Standard 7, when we had an 'Eastern Extravaganza', I wore a Punjabi and everything and ended up being the first princess. The Indian girls looked at me and talked to each other, because I looked so good in the outfit I was wearing. I think they were jealous.

Natalie also stated that she thought she was beautiful and that this put her at an advantage over both boys, because they wanted to go out with her, and girls, because they wanted to look like her. She also sees her looks as positive because no one can define her or box her. She recalled a situation where she was sitting in a café with her friends and a woman came up to her and told her she "looked like the UN". She saw this as a compliment and as giving her freedom from having to fit into a racial category.

Park (1928) argued that the biracial individual had the advantage of allowing the individual an insight into the workings of two social groups, which provided a "wider horizon" for them (Park 1928: 881). When looking at the following comments made by the participants, the latter seems to be true. Daniel, Prashantha, Kerry and Natalie found that being part of two different groups helped them understand both points of view. This was often used as a mediating point or in bridging the gap between the racial groups at school and freed them in a way that the other children could not experience. Mayuri remembers an incident where her White friends did not want to attend an Indian girl's party because she lived in an Indian township, which they perceived as "dangerous". She managed to challenge these stereotypes and could make them see the situation from a different angle, which resulted in their attending the party together.

For Daniel, being half-Indian, half-White proved advantageous, especially when it came to finding a date for his school dance. He told his classmates, "I've got a passport to do whatever I want — I could

go White, I could go Indian — it's a privilege". Being biracial also allowed him access to two worlds, something which he described as "like a pendulum, you can swing between the two extremes". This placed the participants in a position where they had access to not just the Indian and the White group, but a number of different racial groups. For example, Daniel and Prashantha both described how at breaks they could move between the different groups. The point here is that such wider social acceptance is important to teenagers, with the general insecurities that often accompany this age. Daniel explains,

> I remember how at break times, we used to have almost like a 'Group Areas Act' happening because there would be an area where all the Indians would sit, an area for the African group and then there would be an area where the White group would sit. I could mix between them.

This he also saw as having a positive effect on his fellow students, as he says, "Maybe it was good that people could see me moving around and realize that you didn't have to stick to any particular race group". David and Prashantha's narratives highlight how they have been able to use their unique situation as change agents in their desegregated schools in a post-apartheid South Africa.

It could be argued that to compare the participants' positive responses to the negative theories regarding 'the marginal man' may be unhelpful. It is true that some of the participants did speak of a certain amount of confusion (Francis 2007: 267). However, these in no way overshadowed their generally positive outlook about their identities. The confusion the participants spoke of only operated at a superficial level when their identity was problematised by external sources, such as when classmates and officials attempted to lock them into rigid racial identities such as by asking "What are you?" It should be noted, that the issue of the participants' grappling with their identity negotiation is not uncommon for any individual of their age, and not just in relation to "race". As Steyn (2001: xxi-xxii) argues, all population groups in South Africa, whether willingly or unwillingly, successfully or unsuccessfully, are engaged in the renegotiation of their identities.

What the participants' stories bring into focus is that the participants see their biracial identity as something positive and not as something that burdens them (Francis 2007: 267). Perhaps a connection can here be made to McNay's (1994: 26) point that the labelling of certain groups of individuals as marginal provides those groups with a coherent identity from which resistant counter-identities may be formulated — for instance the idea of "queer" politics. As Nicole shows,

> I have half of each race in me. I am happy with that mix: I am blessed with the better of two beautiful worlds. I am not cursed, I am blessed [...] I would not have had my situation any different.

5. Conclusion

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, a sum that included but was not limited to their racial identity. Their descriptions of their identity formation suggest an ongoing dialectical process that involved the making of choices amongst various social identities as they moved from one context to another. All nine participants spoke about current challenges and issues that were far more significant in their lives than grappling with having to choose one racial identity that is not fully expressive of one's background. Despite all the assumptions that biracial individuals will be born into a racial netherworld, destined to be confused, unstable, maladjusted and perpetual victims of a racially polarised society, the participants' stories in my study reveal that they see their biracial identity as something positive and not as something that burdens them.

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