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Identity and Oppression: Differential Responses to an In-between Status

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RUNNING HEAD: IDENTITY AND OPPRESSION

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Abstract

Oppression operates at various levels, with varying degrees of negativity, and groups respond in markedly different ways. In this article, the in-between status of the coloured South African group is used to illustrate issues of identity and oppression under the Apartheid system – and differing ways in which oppression was experienced and used. The coloured group had many social advantages over Blacks, but were also used to oppress that group. Habituation, accommodation, and relative advantage were identified as dynamics within the broader context of power and privilege that contributed to cultural and psychological marginality and status ambivalence of the coloureds. These processes must be understood within the historical, social, and political context of the community. What is evident from the data is that groups and individuals can take up various positions along a continuum of oppressor-oppressed, depending upon the contexts, time, and social and legal relationships involved in their interactions.

Keywords: Oppression, racism, identity, consciousness-raising, marginality, empowerment.

### Identity and Oppression: Differential Responses to an In-between Status

While the deleterious psychological effects of colonialism and oppression have been widely discussed (e. g., Memmi, 1967, 1984; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1994; Watts, 1994a, 1994b; Wolf, 1986); it must be noted that not all oppressed groups experience, or perceive, their oppression with the same levels of negativity. Some groups are placed between those wielding power and those with none; they are afforded certain privileges over other oppressed communities. It has been suggested that coloured<sup>2 3</sup> South Africans filled this role under Apartheid (Sonn & Fisher, 1996; Sparks, 1991). Such a status has considerable implications for individual and community development.

In this paper we draw on data collected from coloured South African immigrants in Australia. They were asked about their South African communities and experiences in order to identify social and psychological responses arising from their oppression. Research in this area has focused mostly on the compensatory and accommodatory responses to oppression. However, the main aim of this article is to understand the different responses that groups' placed in a position between the oppressor and oppressed develop in the face of adversity. A part of the focus in this paper is on the implications of oppression for identity. That is, we mean the social identities that we are ascribed because of our group membership (Tajfel, 1981), including cultural, racial and ethnic groups.

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<sup>2</sup>Under the Population Registration Act, coloured referred mainly to groups with mixed African and European ancestry, as well as Asians, Indians, etc.

<sup>3</sup> The spelling "coloured" because it is both the spelling used in South Africa and in the Apartheid legislation.

### Oppression and Human Development

Oppression operates at individual and group levels, and people adapt to it in different ways. Much of the existing research demonstrates the negative impacts of oppression: cultural depreciation and the removal of core cultural identities leading to self-hatred, the internalization of negative group identities, and low self-esteem (Bartky, 1990; Fanon, 1967a, b; Freire, 1972, 1994; Jones, 1991). Oppressive social systems can lead to deculturation and cultural estrangement (Fanon, 1967a). Furthermore, oppression interferes with the reproduction of tradition, thus threatening the healthy development of the individual and of the community as a whole (Bartky, 1990; Fanon, 1967a, b; Sloan, 1996).

Different models of individual and group responses to intercultural contact, which often involves oppression, have been proposed (e. g., Berry, 1984, 1997; Bulhan, 1985; Tajfel, 1981; Wolf, 1986). While there are differences within these models, they highlight a set of common responses, including assimilation, accommodation and internalization. In this paper, the use of these terms is in line with Tajfel's (1981) definitions. Assimilation involves rejecting a minority status in favor of that of the majority, and can include passing, the masking of a true social identity and the appearance of moving into a new group. Accommodation means a group's attempts to compete on its own terms to gain material and other resources that are valued by the majority while retaining their ethnic identity. Internalization means acceptance of a minority status and it often takes place when groups see no alternatives to an existing system and that system is perceived as legitimate.

Internalization is the process by which external realities become part of a person's

subjective world (Fanon, 1967a). People come to see themselves in terms of the dominant structure as inferior and powerless (Wolf, 1986). One of the negative impacts referred to by Fanon (1967) was psychic alienation or psychological oppression that reflects internalization.

Psychological oppression is the internalized view of self as negative, and as not deserving more resources or increased participation in societal affairs, resulting from the use of affective, behavioral, cognitive, linguistic and cultural mechanisms designed to solidify political domination (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996, p.130).

Although the focus of oppression research is on the impact of unequal power, there is evidence that minorities can, eventually participate in their own oppression (Wolf, 1986). Wolf described how some become accustomed to, and accept the oppressive social patterns as normal and inevitable over the passage of time (habituation); others learn to accept and fit into a particular social order because they are forced too (accommodation). Accommodation is facilitated by the processes of relative advantage, group conservatism, and dependency. With relative advantage, a group legitimates the status quo by favorably comparing itself with groups in lower strata. Group conservatism entails an unwillingness to take risks and cling to what the group has. The actions of a few could bring repercussions for the whole group; hence, the risks of acting are too great and internal coercion keeps members in line.

The explanations of responses to oppression are useful in providing insight into the social and psychological processes and adaptations in response to oppressive structures. However, they do not challenge oppression through the promotion of social transformation that could lead to the reaffirmation and reclaiming of valued social identities and cultures. It seems that oppression is

conceptualized in dichotomous terms and as unidirectional, those who have power and those who have none. These models seem to represent a progression of mutually exclusive stages to some finality in the outcomes and fail to recognize the multiple levels at which oppression operates (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). Therefore, rather than just considering a dichotomy, one could consider points on a continuum when examining the dynamics of oppression on intergroup relations (Sonn & Fisher, 2000). By framing oppression as a continuum within a social ecology, we are better placed to understand the experiences, perceptions, and behaviors of those groups who find themselves in between those who oppress and those who are oppressed. In turn, the multiple ways in which these groups experience oppression and the implications for adaptation can be elucidated. Lessons can be learned for the multiple positions all groups and individuals may have in relation to oppression – whether at the interpersonal, group, or broader level and in contexts such as home, work, and school.

#### Positive and Multilevel Responses to Oppression

Oppression and racism, although negative experiences, do not lead to only negative outcomes. Negative and/or threatening experiences, such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination, can serve as factors that unify and mobilize groups (Bulhan, 1985; Jones, 1990; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Spencer and Markstrom-Adams cited studies suggesting how negative experiences can foster ingroup preferences, encouraging people to gain a deeper understanding of one's own group. Communities could find ways to protect cultural values and practices in alternative settings and structured events – providing the

basis for renewal and resistance in freer circumstances (Sonn & Fisher, 1998).

Such resistance may not be readily comprehended because it may operate at the same time as other adaptive responses, or it may only be exhibited in settings distant from the dominant group. For example, O’Neill (1994) argued that Native Americans do not always internalize negative encounters with whites, but challenge and reframe those experiences in their own settings. In this way, there are surface reactions to the negative experiences – perhaps reflecting accommodation – but under the surface, and in contexts which are perceived as safe, there are responses which are much more resistant and which help maintain a level of power for the group.

Liberation movements can play a crucial role in developing critical awareness about oppression, empowerment, and social change. Reclaiming devalued and lost cultural and other identities through transformative research and action is a core project for community and liberation psychology (Comas-Díaz, Lykes, & Alarcón, 1998; Trickett, Watts, Birman, 1994; Watts, 1992). Comas-Díaz, et al. stated that “Indigenous approaches to psychology anchored in a liberation discourse are resources for rescuing cultural memories and archetypes with which to reconstruct a new, transformed, and more egalitarian future” (1998, p. 790). Freire’s (1970, 1972) notion of critical consciousness is central to liberation and social change. It involves the development of a critical understanding of the sociopolitical forces that shape human behavior and stifle human potential.

The development of critical consciousness involves two tasks -- denunciation and annunciation (Prilleltensky, 1990). Denunciation involves the deconstruction of negative



narratives that alter peoples' views of the social and political forces that impact their lives; while annunciation is about creating the means to promote positive change. For example, Watts, Griffith, and Abdul-Adil (1999) have developed a model for sociopolitical development, centering on consciousness-raising, as an antidote to oppression. They argued that an acute awareness of our sociopolitical realities is central to overcoming oppression.

As has been shown, oppression can negatively impact group and individual identity formation, groups may also resist oppression, and there are many different mechanisms that facilitate the process. There is, however, scarce research exploring the social and psychological responses and development of mixed ancestry groups such as coloureds and Anglo-Indians. They draw their identity from varying sources and may experience oppression in several different directions because of the status they occupy within their social system.

### 'Mixed-ancestry' Groups

The coloured community of South Africa has had a long, ambivalent, and ignored history (Adhikari, 1991). Census figures of 1996 shows that 8.9% of the South African population of 40.58 million classified themselves as coloured, 76.6% as African, 10.9% as white, and 2.6% as Indian/Asian (South African Government, 2001). The coloured community was defined under Apartheid, which included the cornerstone legislation: Population Registration Act; Immorality, Mixed Marriages, and the Group Areas Acts that were introduced in the late 1940's and early 1950's. The Group Areas Act resulted in people being forcibly removed from areas reclassified for whites, and relocated into government designated coloured areas (Platzky & Walker, 1985).

With the implementation of the Apartheid system, the group was assigned a racial identity label and status that separated them from black and white groups. After the implementation of the Population Registration Act (1950), “race” was defined according to physical appearance and social acceptance or rejection. The institutionalized identity label, coloured, and the accompanying racial status in the hierarchy, signified the political construction of the coloured group. It meant the creation of a heterogeneous, nationally subjugated group, a group that had an extremely diverse physical and ‘cultural’ make-up. Some coloured people might physically appear white and some might physically appear black. In general, however, the coloured community was strategically located in an intermediate position characterized by privilege and oppression in relation to black and white groups, respectively.

Both before and during Apartheid, the coloured South Africans filled the second stratum of society, afforded many privileges in education, employment and living arrangements. Prior to the Apartheid laws, they would often mix with the politically dominant Europeans, although experiencing a degree of social distance. It was the Europeans from whom they derived much of their culture and to whom they looked for their social identity (Fisher & Sonn, 1999). After the implementation of Apartheid, rigid social and legal structures imposed hard boundaries on the relationships between groups, and officially relegated the coloureds to a second-class status.

While holding an in-between status, the coloured South Africans had other identity challenges. Sonn and Fisher (1996) have shown that there was ambivalence to the labels applied, and to the roles that these labels entailed. It appears as though the group rejected the legal label of coloured, but retained it as a ‘social’ identity label to define who they were to others within

the group. That is, some would use the label among themselves, but resented it when outsiders used the label. Others have suggested that the label coloured was dehumanizing (Adhikari, 1991).

The coloured community in South Africa found themselves in a similar position as the Anglo-Indian group during British colonial rule. Bose (1979) wrote that the Anglo-Indians represented a buffer between the British rulers and the Indian ruled, “uncomfortably sandwiched between the disapproval of the rulers and the distrust of the ruled” (p. 9). Both the Anglo-Indian and the South African coloured groups occupied a status of in-betweenity. Cultural in-betweenity (Bulhan, 1978, 1980, 1985) reflects patterns of psychological defense and identity formation among groups dominated for prolonged periods. In Bulhan’s formulation, cultural in-betweenity is a zone where dominant and dominated cultures interact and mutually influence each other. Originally introduced to capture intercultural contact, in-betweenity can be meaningfully applied to describe the situation of both the Anglo-Indian and coloured South African communities. The status and privileges afforded these groups created conditions that saw them wedged in-between the dominant and dominated. They were in the ambiguous position of being semi-oppressor and semi-oppressed. The dominant group controlled them, while at the same time they were in positions of comparative advantage over those placed beneath them in their respective social systems.

Some Anglo-Indians responded to the situation of powerlessness and marginality by emigrating to other countries such as Canada, Britain, and Australia (Gist & Wright, 1973). In these countries, there was a shared language and set of British historical traditions which meant

that the groups could relatively freely integrate and become part of the dominant community, while still holding onto the cultural heritage and social identities to which they aspire. Later in India, the confirmation of an Anglo-Indian identity and the promise of equal rights and privileges with other citizens lowered emigration rates.

As with the Anglo-Indians, many South Africans responded to their situation by emigrating to new countries including British Commonwealth countries such as Australia. South African immigration to Australia reached a peak in 1986-87, decreased after that, but increased again in 1992-1993 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999). According to the 1996 census, there were 55,755 South Africa-born persons in Australia, however, there is no information to indicate what proportion would have been classified coloured. Reasons noted for migration are diverse and include political, economic, and family concerns, as well as the need to find better futures for their children (Fisher & Sonn, 1999; Sonn, 1991). In the new countries, people are faced with the challenges of settlement, remaking of lives and integrating their valued identities and experiences into the new context.

In this study, we draw on the data from a larger study that explored psychological sense of community (SOC) among coloured South African immigrants to Australia (Sonn, 1995). The larger study was conducted in two stages. The first study was retrospective focusing specifically on the shared understandings and experiences participants had of their South African communities. The SOC framework comprises the elements of membership, integration and fulfillment of needs, influence, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and provided a framework to guide inquiry into participants' understandings and experiences of their

South African communities. In the second study we explored how these understandings, experiences, and SOC are translated into the Australian context, and the implications for ethnic identity and psychological wellbeing.

It has been reported that the model captured the positive experiences of community for this group (Sonn & Fisher, 1996; Sonn, 1995), with a distinct theme related to adaptations to racial oppression under Apartheid. In this paper we turn our attention to issues of oppression that emerged in the larger study with an analysis of those data. In this paper, we are specifically interested in understanding the experiences of oppression and its implications for identity, particularly because of the 'in-between' status.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 23 people participated in the study -- eight females and 15 males, between the ages of 23 and 74 years (mean age = 38.48 years). Participants were recruited using a snowball technique. It was an initial criterion that all participants lived in Australia and were at least 16 years old before emigration from South Africa. Participants resided in suburbs of Melbourne, Australia and had been living in Australia between three and 16 years. Most of the participants had completed matriculation (the final year of secondary school) in a coloured community in South Africa, and came from the urban centers, Cape Town and Durban. The average length of education for the group was 14 years (with a range of 12 - 21 years). Most males had completed some technical or trade qualification, whilst most of the females were employed in clerical and administrative occupations, both in Australia and in South Africa.

The participants were not a refugee group because they met the criteria for immigration to Australia. These governmental criteria included health, education, employability and age. Although the participants did not meet the criteria for refugee status, which includes fear of persecution because of their beliefs, politics, or ethnicity (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951), it could be argued that strong push factors related to the Apartheid system impacted decisions to relocate (Sonn, 1991, 1995).

### Instrument

The interview guide was developed to assess the elements of the SOC framework (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), and also drew on the findings of previous research into this group (Sonn, 1991). Two people (one Australian and one South African) read the interview schedule to ascertain the face validity, specificity, and clarity of the questions. Sample questions that were used to guide the interviews included: What stories or myths are there that illustrate the coloured culture; what aspects about life in the coloured community do you feel proud to tell others about; how do you think white/black South Africans viewed coloureds; what political events shaped the coloured identity/community; and how did coloured people perceive themselves as different from other racial groups?

### Procedure

Data were collected through tape-recorded, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. All participants were informed about the nature of the study and that they could withdraw at any stage prior to interviewing. In-depth conversations allowed the interviewer to gather detailed information about the participants' perceptions, thoughts, attitudes and experiences they had in

their communities in South Africa.

### Data Analysis

Data analyses involved thematic content analysis and were guided by the processes outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). The data were recorded in a question-ordered matrix. A matrix is constructed by having the first column represent individual participants, and the subsequent columns specific questions asked of them. The cells of the matrix were used to record participant responses, quotations and keywords, to interview questions, the row representing the set of responses for an individual participant, and the column the participants' responses to specific questions. By use of such a matrix, the researcher can view the sets of responses and examine them for consistencies across questions that reflect themes, which emerge from the data independent of the question the data originally belonged to. The researcher also views the data in order to determine if there are counter themes or ideas that assist in the understanding of the findings.

In the main study, the elements of the SOC framework (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) were used to guide the analysis. Those analyses focused on capturing and explaining themes reflecting the psychological sense of community of this group of coloured South Africans who had immigrated to Australia (see, Sonn & Fisher, 1996, 1998). An additional theme, not captured by the SOC framework, emerged -- this theme was oppression.

In the current study, we continued the analysis, following the procedures used in the main study of working through the question-ordered matrix exploring the issue of oppression. The process is consistent with substantive and grounded theorizing (see Wicker, 1989) where issues

in the substantive domain are identified and then brought into conversation with the conceptual and theoretical domains. The first author's experience as a member of the community helped interpret the data because he could understand idiosyncratic language use and clarify particular events, recollections, and issues pertaining to experiences in South Africa.

### Findings and Interpretation

Because of its in-between status and position, some specific issues related to oppression emerged for this community. Oppression comprised three conceptually relevant sub-themes under the broader theme of "adapting to a status of in-betweenity". These related to issues of imposed identity labels and mechanisms that are involved in maintaining oppression – a) growing used to imposed labels; b) holding on: using racialized ideologies to maintain privilege; c) and sociopolitical change.

#### Growing used to Imposed Labels: Accommodation and Habituation

The processes by which people became used to the imposed label of coloured varied, with some of this dependent upon the age of participants and the different nature of their experiences under Apartheid. Some participants specifically mentioned that the Group Areas Act meant the destruction of their ways of life and the relocation of families into settings to be shared with other "people of similar origin". Those who were defined as coloured "were to live among their own people".

The following comment illustrates the negative impact of the label and its embeddedness in the Apartheid legal structure:

"I think the reason that there isn't anything in particular [about the coloured group] in my



mind is the fact that I don't think coloureds are proud of who they are ... Some of them could say I'm black and proud of it -- maybe? But that comes down to history, the Group Areas Act, we were put there so to speak. You were a coloured!"

Participants responded to the Apartheid grouping in different ways. For example, one suggested that:

"all people from the same culture reinforces the idea that it is one group, and depending on how you see it, that either makes the group stronger or weaker".

Another person named the predetermined nature of life in a racial category:

"The label you're given from the time that you are born until the time you die. If you live there everything you do socially, economically, educationally, you name it ... is slotted into those three racial groups..."

These responses did not occur in a vacuum. There are subtle and coercive ideological processes that enforce the acceptance of a role and status. A participant said:

"It is very easy for someone who is coloured to think that they are one step better than someone who is black and stay in their place because they are one step inferior to someone who is white, because that is the stereotype that is created there and that myth gets perpetuated all the time. In a way you are brain-washed into thinking that's the way things are and that's the way it's supposed to be."

A participant noted, coloureds "belittled (themselves) as far as the white man was concerned," but this was because they "were indoctrinated to respond in this way."

In South Africa, the socialization of people into their racial strata played an important

role in imparting a second-class status and notions of separateness among people in the coloured community. At one level, socialization reflects how participants accommodated the system and, at another, it shows that people got used to the label and viewed it in the context of the system -- their social and political realities. In the following quotations, participants reported that they had become accustomed to the label; they had to accept the label as normal.

“As a kid it was basically skin colour -- I knew I was coloured because I was told I was coloured.”

“People perceived themselves to be coloured because they had to be coloured.”

“We were told that we were coloured and had to accept the idea.”

“It was normal for people (to be viewed as coloured), you were born in the system.”

“Sort of automatic, when asked you would say Cape Coloured. It is a label that appeared in your identification book.”

As Simone (1993) stated of South Africans: “Their physical appearance and genealogy have in large part determined their destiny, and their aspirations, positions, thoughts, and experiences, accorded limited value.” (p. 81).

The data show that participants were aware that the label was imposed and that it had become part of their everyday reality, they had become accustomed to it. In Wolf’s (1986) terms they had become habituated. At the same time as resigning to the inevitability of the label, it was viewed in the broader social structure of domination. Although participants had come to accept the imposed labels, it was clear to them that the white group determined these identities.

Importantly, along with resignation, there was also some resistance to the label.

It has been argued that prolonged oppression can lead to internalization of oppressive systems. Responses to questions about events that shaped the coloured community demonstrated an interesting mix of rejection, acceptance, and co-option of identity labels. The responses showed that people took on the race label but explained it in terms of the broader structure of domination. This is illustrated by the following quotations.

“What the coloured group had was political. We as a group was established as a political instrument, ... as a political means to an end -- for separation.”

“Unfortunately one can't divorce oneself from the political structure in South Africa because I feel that the whole political set up -- that is what sort of shaped the development of the so-called coloured group.”

“The Apartheid system created groups, white, coloured and black. We were torn between two. One can't divorce oneself from the politics.”

The following excerpt captures this viewpoint:

“...ethnic groups were political terms, they were decidedly political terms.... For political experiences (group) differences were highlighted, emphasized and recognised by the government. We use the term [coloured] because we are familiar with it. When we use it we know exactly who we are talking about... we do not necessarily accept these terms.”

These comments reflect an acute awareness of the externally imposed nature of the label and, at the same time, acknowledge that the label was used at an informal level within the community.

These comments highlight the equivocal way in which some people responded to the imposed ethnic identity label. In general, it seems that these participants did not accept the

imposed identity label, but saw it as part of a boundary creation and maintenance strategy linked to the socio-legal structure. They did not like the label but felt resigned to it. This reflects a psychological tension between the acceptance and non-acceptance of the label, which, however, needs to be considered in the broader context. People did not like the label, but felt resigned to it and, at the same time, they valued the experiences they internalized because of their group membership. The broader context was one characterized by domination and based on notions of white supremacy.

#### Holding on: Using racialized Ideologies to Maintain Privilege

The second, related theme points to the mobilization of race-based ideologies to create and reinforce boundaries. As has been illustrated with the Anglo-Indian community (Gist & Wright, 1973), groups can replicate oppressive structures through the adaptations they make to their contexts. Because of the status of the coloured community in South Africa, notions of being superior over blacks were constructed and played a central part in construing self and others. These constructions were part of a larger social system that had at its core ideologies and myths of racial superiority (Sidanius, 1993). Stereotypes give useful insight into the ambivalent responses to oppression. In many instances, stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies, that is, people come to accept their truth. As reflected in the literature on oppression people often uncritically accept negative images that can work to maintain separateness (Fanon, 1967a, b; Goffman, 1961; Montero, 1990; Watts, 1992; Wolf, 1986).

Participants stated that: “Whites saw coloureds as a lower class people, ... dependent on the white group”; “Coloureds were seen as domestic servants” and “White people don’t have a

high regard for coloured people.” Some stated that: “Blacks viewed coloureds as a nonentity, they had no identity”, and “Blacks viewed coloureds as being more towards the whites because of the economic situation”. The following quotation captures the stereotypes and ideology that work to maintain some of the divisions in the community:

“Coloureds move towards the whites because of the fact that they lived a middle of the road existence in terms of economics.... The blacks felt that the coloureds did not always identify with their cause. They saw the coloureds as a buffer between the black and white nations of South Africa.”

Some participants offered explanations about the origins of the stereotypes and ideologies. For example, “coloureds felt superior to Africans because of instilled beliefs -- a result of Apartheid.” It was also said that; “each community perceived themselves as just below the white group, Apartheid created and reinforced these perceptions and hierarchical divisions.” Whether this represents the articulation of the basis for these stereotypes, or provides a rationalization for these feelings could be explored further to determine the extent of their co-option into the system.

Participants suggested that some coloureds had negative views of blacks and felt threatened by them. These views and fears are summarized by one participant who said; certain coloureds did not mix with blacks “because they were [seen as] bastards, dirty - they can kill you. ...Sounds stupid but those were the reasons people were giving.” Also, coloureds “could tell or sense that a lot of black people hated them so they would either sit on the fence or move to the white camp.”

These comments suggest that in instances where there are hierarchies based on racist precepts, ideologies and stereotypes can be put into motion to marginalize others placed lower in a social system while at the same time the group looks after its own interest and wellbeing. Although the coloured group suffered political oppression because of the Apartheid power structures, they still had advantages compared to Black South Africans.

Less salient themes reflected uncertainty about cultural traits, while others acknowledged the diversity of the group's cultural heritage. For example, "there were no distinctive symbols" in the coloured group and "I don't think there are any coloured traits." Participants suggested that the coloured group inherited cultural traits from most of its "ancestral groups", which include African, Asian, and European groups. A participant said that the group's traits and characteristics were "taken from other groups." Some respondents mentioned that food, music, and language (dialect) contained residuals of ancestral groups. A few participants mentioned that "the minstrels" [a choir group] was perhaps a "visible reflection of [coloured] culture". Not all respondents had a high regard for the minstrels.

These comments alert us to the connections between identity and community and the link to the socio-legal structure and the racial hierarchy. At a cultural level the issues were more complex because the cultural diversity of the group challenged the foundations of the system. The diversity revealed that ethnicity was not a key criterion for group membership, but for exclusion based on skin colour and notions of race. This raises important questions about the sources of identity and community for this group and also the implications of the removal of the Apartheid system for those who were classified as coloured during the Apartheid regime.

### Sociopolitical Change

During the 1970's there was a growing activism opposing Apartheid, which saw a variety of active and passive responses to the government. Many respondents said that the school boycotts of 1976 (a by-product of the Soweto uprising), the active South African Council of Sports (SACOS), the United Democratic Front (UDF), the liberation theology espoused by certain churches and their leaders (in particular Allan Boesak, and Desmond Tutu), represented the political voice of a changing coloured community and served as an indicator of the group's increasing political awareness and resistance to pressures from outside. These organizations' political philosophies (e. g., "no normal sport in an abnormal society", one government for all, a non-racial society) and political strategies (e.g., consumer and school boycotts, supporting your community, non-participation in white sports, etc.) encouraged people to support black community initiatives, social and sporting events, business, etc. They also served as an indicator of the group's increasing political awareness and involvement in the struggle for liberation. For example, a participant said that:

“... (the) Soweto riots influenced the development of the coloured identity. After the riots I found that coloureds were more and more identifying with the black community. Not readily so, because there were parts of the coloured community that was still clinging to the white community's way of thinking ...”.

The unrest in the early 1980's also influenced the community. A participant said “the coloured identity came to the fore, ... not a coloured identity on its own because coloureds identified with the black situation.” Molteno (1987), for example, reflecting on the 1980's boycotts, confirmed

that the unrest and school boycotts contributed to a greater awareness of sociopolitical factors affecting the country, in particular sections of the coloured older generation that accepted their fate. It seems that these events may have contributed to some sort of critical questioning or encounter (Cross, 1991) that contributed to the deconstruction and redefinition of the coloured identity and status.

The distancing from the imposed label also reflects a level of change and awareness raising. Even though they felt that the label was rigid and fixed, they did not necessarily internalize it, and distanced themselves from the label. The data reflected participants' distancing themselves from the label coloured. They mentioned a number of responses typifying how they felt about the label -- for example, to be labeled coloured felt "awful", they "hated it", it was "depressing", it was "an insult", and it was "derogatory in South Africa".

When participants were asked how they would define themselves, there was a strong tendency for participants to define themselves in terms of their national identity, that is, South African "...irrespective of colour or creed..." as one participant said. This identity option may well be the most salient to this sample because, as immigrants, they would have nationality as a category to draw on. Interestingly, James, Caliguire, and Cullinan (1996) reported that South African is a preferred identity label among coloured people in the Western Cape Province. There are important questions about the processes of ethnic identity development for different groups in South Africa. Hocoy (1999) have begun this process by assessing the applicability of Cross's (1991) theory to that context. He stated that the theory is useful but needs to be contextualized in social-political-historical realities to capture the South African experience. He also said that it



would be more appropriate to develop indigenous frameworks for understanding racial and ethnic identity development in South Africa and Africa generally.

The issues of identity and intergroup relations have become more salient now that the Apartheid system has been dismantled. Stevens (1998), for example, showed that coloured people draw on ideologies of race developed during the Apartheid era to respond to, and make sense of, race relations in the post-Apartheid context. Efforts to respond to community concerns and needs are also reflected by the initiatives of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (James, et al., 1996). How do people define themselves in the new South Africa? What does it mean and what are the experiences of people of mixed-ancestry in the new South Africa? What role will cultural reconstruction and demystification play in the reconciliation process and in contributing to healthy individuals and communities? These are important questions and our research with coloured people who migrated to Australia suggest that positive cultural scripts and experiences rooted in the home country play an important role providing psychological and cultural resources for responding to migration and settlement (Sonn, 1995; Sonn & Fisher, 1996).

### Discussion

The aim of this paper was to explore psychological and social issues related to identity that developed because of oppression drawing on interview data collected from coloured South African immigrants in Australia (Sonn, 1995; Sonn & Fisher, 1996, 1998). Interview data support the presence of an ambivalent relationship to the coloured label that was imposed upon them, but also the nature of the responses that were necessary to maintain the level of privilege that they held when compared to the blacks. Indeed, this in-between position, and the

equivocation resulting from it, provides lessons about the nature of oppression, oppressing, and the experiences and perceptions of those involved. While we cannot generalize from the data, important insights emerge into issues of development under oppressive conditions.

Viewing the group's responses within that larger social and political context allows one to discern some of the dynamics of oppression and processes that sustain oppressive systems. The coloured community was allowed privileges and access to resources that the black group was not. This preferential treatment confirmed the hierarchical structure of domination and set up conditions that fostered intergroup dynamics such as comparative advantage (Wolf, 1986). They were in a relatively better social, educational, and economic position than the larger black group, yet still legally and socially subordinate to the whites. In that context, they had material and other advantages over the blacks -- and the system encouraged and facilitated the retention of those advantages. Thus, through the process of social comparison, people saw themselves as better off and tried to retain that advantage.

These mechanisms must be coupled with an understanding of the broader ideologies of racial superiority and inferiority that underpinned the racial hierarchy and allocation of resources. These ideologies or legitimizing myths (Sidanius, 1993) provide the tools to devalue and marginalise groups as not worthy or deserving or to portray them as scary and filthy. Apartheid ideologies were invoked and perpetuated from a position of relative power and used to maintain the group's relative privilege. In addition to the mechanisms that operated as part of a divide and conquer strategy, there is also evidence that draws our attention to the social and psychological ambiguities, contradictions and tensions that resulted because of the status of in-

betweenity. Bulhan's (1985) notion of cultural in-betweenity was extended to conceptualize the status of the coloured South African group. It seems that the status of in-betweenity gave an ambivalent sense of safety and security as well as vulnerability derived from the position within that system. This ambivalent sense of safety and security and vulnerability of the position is conditional because an even more powerful group determined it. That is, the group was safe knowing that it had some advantage over those lower in the social system and it was vulnerable because their privilege was determined by a dominant other.

Researchers in South Africa have shown that people accommodated notions of community and ethnic and racial identity rooted in Apartheid structures and that these notions influence how people respond to change in that country (Stevens, 1998; Stevens, & Lockhart, 1997). For example, Stevens has argued that coloured people draw on the Apartheid ideology to make sense of affirmative action policies because of the perceived impact of those on the community. They draw on the notion of race to explain their perceptions and feelings of threat to the economic, social, and political, privilege that they had under Apartheid.

In the Australian context, there are different ideologies and discourses about race and ethnicity and there are intergroup and other social and political processes that influence group formation and individual development. For example, members of the dominant white group in Australia often refer to coloured people as black, while members of the coloured group use the label South African as an identity marker. The challenges associated with social identity development among immigrants and other non-dominant groups have received considerable attention and have been articulated in models that capture responses to intercultural contact (e.

g., Berry, 1984, 1997; Bulhan, 1985; Tajfel, 1981). Those models focus largely on groups that have a discernible ethnic and cultural heritage and suggest unitary responses. The data suggest that for the coloured group the issues of identity and identity remaking must be understood within a sociopolitical framework with power and privilege as core concepts.

For this group, social identity related interventions and community building initiatives have to include a focus on challenging negative ideologies that members may hold about black South Africans and white South Africans and developing an awareness of the social and political processes that impact community and individual development. One of the important tasks will be to develop a clear understanding of the group's and the country's histories that would form a foundation for deconstructing these negative ideologies and for identifying positive sources for community building. It will also be important to understand the social and psychological functions that racialized ideologies based on the South African experiences may fulfill for members of the community in the Australian context. At one level these ideologies may be an attempt to claim some control and, at another, they serve as barriers to community building.

What also becomes evident from these ideologies is the nature of oppression and the place groups hold at various times and in various relationships. The in-between role is one that is indicative of a continuum of oppression instead of the simple idea of a dichotomy, as is the equivocation in the nature of the responses from the participants. At times there are expressions of views that appear to support the Apartheid stereotypes, along with self-correction. The views are expressed, but are taken back; the power is recognized over the blacks, but there is a desire for the position not to have to be so. While the coloured community held a position in-between

blacks and whites, it was not simply in the middle, the location changed according to a number of other relationships and contexts.

Concomitant with the changing nature of the oppression-oppressor roles is the ways in which the respondents indicate their adaptations to the relationship between the groups. While the models from Tajfel (1981), Berry (1997) and others provide an apparent progression through a series of stages, the data provide quite a different picture. From the comments of participants and the emergent themes, there are clear shifts between the stages -- perhaps a phase concept would be better. That is, stage models assume a unitary and unidirectional nature of response. However, in line with the movement along the oppression continuum, a phase model understanding allows for different levels of adaptive responses reflecting the place, time, and the legal and social interactions that are occurring. This understanding of the responses to oppression is consistent with O'Neil's (1994) suggestion that adaptations to intergroup encounters that may reflect accommodation by a minority in one setting may be reframed to then reflect resistance and a maintaining of power in another setting.

These interpretations may provide a lesson for the expression of oppression and groups' rights in a broader context. The simple representation of the group who are the oppressors and the group oppressed is a denial of the reality of power differentials within groups; often hiding behind the differences in power between groups. We must also recognize the different ways in which people perceive and experience oppression in their daily contexts. Social comparison and the attempts to maintain a presumed status under threat from those seen as less deserving or less entitled, can be seen in many groups who oppose the extension of rights and privilege to others.

In reality, those doing the opposing are often the most oppressed amongst their own groups – with lack of power, resources, and options.

In summary, oppression is a very complex phenomenon. We do not intend to simplify group responses or to argue that all sectors of the coloured community responded in a uniform manner. We are also aware of the limitations that accompany this kind of research and data analysis. Specifically, we are aware that we did not originally intend to study oppression and identity and that the participants now live in a new social and cultural context with different discourses about race and intergroup relations that may impact their reflections. In this report our aim was to explore the issues that developed drawing on the reflective stories of expatriate South Africans. Based on this data we can say that the status of in-betweenity or semi-oppressed and semi-oppression challenges identity development and contributed to an ambivalent sense of security and vulnerability. By studying a group that is not at the margins or at the core of power, but who are legally in-between, we have uncovered the variations in experiences and responses to oppression. This has allowed us to move beyond the unidirectional and stage models that capture adaptations to intergroup contact to a model that emphasizes the continuum of oppression within a social ecology.

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