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Biracial Identity and Social Marginality

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ABSTRACT: This comparative analysis of classic and recent literature explores the developmental and social implications of biracial identity in the U.S. Though specific attention was given to Black-White biracial persons, a broader analysis yielded some surprising insights into the nature and implications of the "biracial personality" and the accompanying differences in interpersonal styles and social relationships.

Despite the persistent cultural stereotypes depicting the United States as a cultural melting pot, rigid divisions between economic, class, racial and ethnic groups endure. Ours is a heavily stratified society with distinct boundaries and rigid barriers around socially defined groups, roles and status positions. These circumstances are difficult enough for Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and other groups who do not fit neatly into mainstream White society (and are, therefore, socially marginal). However, what happens to those individuals whose racial and cultural heritage is rooted in both White and non-White groups? These individuals belong to both while simultaneously not fully belonging to either (eg. Black and Caucasian). Dual racial identity likewise implies a dual ethnic and cultural focus as well. For the biracial[1] person these two cultural connections are reflected in the type of life one leads; the nature of one's achievements and failures; as well as other social attitudes and aspirations.

[1]For the purposes of this paper, the terms "biracial" or "mixed race" shall refer to those individuals whose parents come from White and non-White racial and ethnic groups (eg. one Black parent and one White parent). Moreover, it is consequently assumed that biracial persons are (at least to some degree) bicultural as well (eg. Mexican-American).

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In fact, this person will be a kind of dual personality possessing a dual social and psychological consciousness which exceeds the kind of "dual consciousness" first suggested by W. E. B. DuBois (1961). This "dual reality" constitutes the essence of the social and psychological dilemma confronting biracial persons. Moreover, this social paradox creates a lifelong social purgatory in which biracial persons are forced to reside.

Due to their unique developmental history, mixed race children will typically possess more insight and sensitivity to both racial groups than single race children since they know firsthand what the racial identity of each implies. For the biracial child, the process of acculturation is rooted in two potentially contradictory frames of reference. This can create what Judy Cavell (1977) terms "non-linear" rather than "linear" identity development. In other words, whereas "whole race" persons develop a relatively linear identity in that their internalized cultural values and self-concepts are reinforced and affirmed by society, biracial persons experience a distinctively different process based upon simultaneously possessing two cultural frames of reference. As a result, biracial persons undergo basic changes in this process and reconstruct their basic self-image as well as their position, role and status in an ongoing way throughout their lifetime (Cavell, 1977). Everett Stonequist further illuminates this notion in his classical work, *The Marginal Man*, when he points out the unwillingness of White society to distinguish between what he calls "mixed bloods" (mulattoes) and "full bloods" (Blacks).

> "This fact is of fundamental significance in comprehending the general characteristics of the American 'mixed blood.' He is not the dejected, spiritless outcast, neither is he the inhibited conformist. He is more likely to be restless and race conscious, aggressive and radical, ambitious and creative. The lower status to which he is assigned naturally creates discontented and rebellious feelings. From an earlier spontaneous identification with the white man, he has, under the rebuffs of a categorical race prejudice, turned about and identified with the Negro race. In the process of so doing, he suffers a profound inner conflict. After all, does not the blood of the white man flow through his veins? Does he not share the higher culture in common with the white American? Is he not legally and morally an American citizen? And yet, he finds himself condemned to a lower caste in the American system! So the mulatto is likely to think of himself. Living in two such social worlds, between which there is antagonism and prejudice, he experiences in himself the same conflict" (Stonequist, 1937, pp. 24–25).

The Formation of Biracial Identity

According to Greenacre (1971, p. 114) "Identity is closely related to identification, whether as an inner process of psychic development or as an act of recognition by a human being toward an outer object, animate or inanimate." Obviously, one's parents or parental figures significantly influence identity formation in young children through the introjection process. However, when these introjects are culturally contradictory (as is the case with biracial children) how does the child decide which parent and ultimately which culture becomes his/her primary identification? One possible determinant relates to the degree of physical similarity between parent and child (including both gender and physical features). Greenacre suggests that one's own body sense is reinforced by constant association with others of predominantly similar appearance throughout life and that "Appearance remains exceedingly important even in a very primitive way and spreads its influence into emotional and supposedly intellectual attitudes" (1971, p. 118).

In any two parent-family each parent influences the child's development in a variety of ways. However, with one Black and one White parent two sometimes contradictory cultural frames of references are communicated and ultimately internalized by the child.

> ". . . a sense of identity involves some relation to others and has a socially determined component with a degree of observation both by the person himself and/or through another person. Even for the individual, his inner sense of himself is not enough to produce a sense of identity. His self-image, based as it is on a fusion of the implicity, but generally not clearly focused awareness of his own form and functioning with his wishes as to how he would like to appear and to function (forerunners and derivatives of identifications and ideals), forms the core on which his sense of his own identity is built. But this core, insofar as the fusion is relatively firm, is comparatively muted and stable. The sense of self-image is maintained and perhaps vitalized by the continual redefinement which accompanies comparison and contrast with others" (Greenacre, 1971, p. 115).

To suggest that mixed race children are likely to have "identity problems," typically refers to the fact that these children do not fit neatly into socially defined racial categories and consequently have difficulty determining their status, role and position relative to both Black and White groups. Such a view analyzes identity from an "in-

teractionist" perspective rather than a purely psychological one. "The racial identity of mixed race children is seen as a result of a complex interaction between individual and social definition" (Wilson, 1987, p. 21). Or, as Berger and Luckman put it, the process by which identity is formed entails a dialectic between identification by others and self-identification; between objectively assigned and subjectively appropriated identity (Berger and Luckman, 1966).

In her classic work, *Race Awareness in Young Children*, Mary Ellen Goodman asserts that: "By the time the child can put into words the question, 'Whom I,' he already has some sense of himself as a person and a sense of mother and father, sisters and brothers and playmates, as outside the boundaries of 'me.' The baby had no real sense of himself, and the idea of the 'me' has been a gradual growth, a result of living with people (as such), of living with people who observe a certain 'style' of life, and of living with unique and individualized people" (Goodman, 1962, p. 38).

Children construct their own sets of thoughts and feelings about themselves based upon the ways in which their environment and significant others within it respond to them combined with their biogenetic predispositions. Particular behaviors, values, patterns and predilections become habituated through unconscious imprinting consistent with the developmental needs of the young child. At the same time this cultural conditioning begins to selectively screen out inconsistent/non-fitting cues from the environment. On both the cognitive and emotional levels, children also begin to not only distinguish between self and others, but between "my group" (those who are like me) and "your group" (those who are not like me). This rough form of group categorization begins by distinguishing boy from girl and continues almost indefinitely throughout life as our awareness of the complexities of categories increases and we make increasingly finer distinctions among categories and our ever changing relationships to them (differentiation).

For very young children, group identity basically amounts to belonging to a simple category depending on the obvious attributes one possesses. Children first notice the more conspicuous attributes and soon after begin to distinguish between facial features, skin color, and hair texture. While young children are relatively unaware that these categories constitute race, they do begin to sense that color has something to do with them socially (Cavell, 1977). Goodman (1962, p. 41) drew the following conclusions about the young children she studied:

1) They are perceiving (registering) the objective features of people, things, behavior, and making classifications on the basis of these perceptions.
2) They are becoming used to a great number of doings and ways of doing, and are increasingly practicing these ways themselves.
3) They are learning to like the things that other people like, and to dislike the things that other people dislike.

G.M. Vaughn (1964, pp. 128–29) goes on to say that non-White children achieve discrimination by race between person-objects before they achieve identification with person-objects. However, the opposite is true for White children. It is arguable that biracial children may be cognizant of color differences in people sooner because their physical features usually make them conspicuously different from either of their parents. By age 7 or 8 the general notion of racial and national inclusion is acquired by virtually all children (ie. "I am a White American."). However, these children are conceptually incapable of belonging to two categories at once because they are developmentally incapable of coordinating two or more different schemas simultaneously. Moreover, such children cannot yet comprehend the incompatibility of various categories. Piaget has demonstrated that prior to age 6 or 7 children have not yet developed a conception of invariance of physical properties (1954). Lacking a sense of permanence, a child's conceptual world is quite different from that of the adult. Consequently, children perceive others' identities as being equally impermanent.

As a result, words which refer to race are often used inconsistently and incorrectly. As children mature, their awareness increases and they become more perceptually discriminating, their attention span broadens, and they acquire logical classification and generalization skills. "Ethnic socialization refers to the developmental processes by which children acquire the behavior, perceptions, values and attitudes of an ethnic group and come to see themselves and others as members of such groups" (Phinney and Rotheram, 1987, p. 11). Moreover, the child begins to develop attitudes about race (as a category) which are cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally consistent. Erik Erikson further elucidated this issue:

> "Every person's psychological identity contains a hierarchy of positive and negative elements, the latter resulting from the fact that the growing human being, throughout his childhood, is presented with evil pro-

> totypes as well as with ideal ones . . . the human being, in fact, is warned not to become what he often had no intention of becoming so that he can learn to anticipate what he must avoid. Thus, the positive identity . . . is always in conflict with that past which is to be lived down and that potential future which is to be prevented" (Erikson, 1965, p. 155).

Upon first entering school, the biracial child will often begin to experience the clash between familiar and accustomed self and familial definitions of identity and contradictory social definitions. According to Cavell, the social definition of children's racial identification is often more important than their actual color or other racial features. For children who are socially categorized as White, personal appearance factors function differently than for those defined as non-White with respect to social acceptability or rejection (Cavell, 1977). Biracial children will probably be more aware of race at an early age because their status is so often called into question by others. Very early on, attention focuses on physical attributes which might socially place them in one category or the other. Frequent questions such as: "What nationality are you?", "What's *your* ethnic background?", or worse yet, "What are you?", immediately brand these children as different with a "you're not normal" implication. This lays the foundation for the status anxiety which is destined to remain with such children throughout their lives. As a result, these children experience considerable difficulty facing the issue of race because it is so emotionally charged and overwhelming. Moreover, biracial children may often identify with a racial group other than the one their membership is assumed to be. If racial marks are obvious, then the consistency of treatment is greater and is probably a factor in promoting personal adjustment. If racial characteristics are obscure, then the child cannot be immediately racially categorized. This is the essence of the child's marginality (Cavell, 1977).

While many persons experience some form of discrimination at some time in their lives, it is a critical experience for the biracial child because "it defines his life course and self-concept in ways that he had not expected. It is a shock because previous contacts had led him to identify himself with a cultural world which now refuses to accept him" (Cavell, 1977). In addition, these children become hypersensitive to circumstances in which White individuals or groups attempt to define them in ways which are not consistent with their self identity. This situation is further exacerbated when the majority

group member pressures the biracial person to accept the social identity over one's self identity. Personal and cultural assumptions previously taken for granted suddenly become problematic for the biracial person. Feelings of confusion, isolation and loss of orientation frequently result. Furthermore, social pressure is exerted to make a choice between White and non-White worlds. Choosing both is not typically viewed as an acceptable option by either group. Nevertheless, this child bears a legitimate claim to membership in both groups.

Bicultural Socialization

Though the converse is not always true, biracial individuals are invariably bicultural as well. Therefore, the bicultural socialization process illuminates much about factors affecting ethnic marginality.

According to Diane de Anda (1984, p. 101), "The cultural deficit model had its heyday in the compensatory education programs that flowed from the War on Poverty in the mid-sixties. This conceptualization posited that norms and cultural patterns of minority groups that varied from those of the majority culture were for the most part deviant and destructive and led to a self-perpetuating 'cycle of poverty and deprivation.'" However, the notion of using mainstream cultural norms as the evaluative criteria presumes the structural inferiority of minority cultures.

How are minority group members able to function within mainstream society while still retaining the integrity of their ethno-cultural identity? According to Charles Valentine (1971) a dual socialization process occurs for minority group members consisting of enculturation experiences within their own cultural group along with significant, but less comprehensive exposure to socialization agents within the majority culture (ie. "cross-cultural socialization"). Consequently, the individual from an ethnic minority group is instructed in the values, perceptions and normative behaviors of two (sometimes opposing) cultural systems.

However, how does one explain the varying degrees of success of different minority individuals and groups who operate successfully within the majority culture? De Anda responds to this question by positing six factors which potentially affect the degree to which a minority group member is likely to become bicultural: (1984, p. 107)

1) The degree of overlap or commonality between the two cultures with regard to norms, values, beliefs, perceptions and the like.
2) The availability of cultural translators, mediators and models.
3) The amount and type (positive or negative) of corrective feedback provided by each culture regarding attempts to produce normative behaviors.
4) The conceptual style and problem-solving approach of the minority individual and their mesh with the prevalent or valued styles of the majority culture.
5) The individual's degree of bilingualism.
6) The degree of dissimilarity in physical appearance from the majority culture such as skin color, facial features and so forth.

Contrary to Valentine's concept, which focuses upon the ability of minority group members to step in and out of the repertoires of two distinct and separate cultures, de Anda's (1984) suggests that the bicultural experience is only possible because the two cultures overlap. Moreover, she believes that dual socialization is facilitated by the degree of cultural overlap. "The European immigrants (in contrast to other minorities) had a much larger area of shared values and norms, and thus were able to identify or had familiarity with a far greater number of the cultural expectations of the mainstream society" (de Anda, 1984, p. 102). In addition, this dual socialization process is further affected by the amount of conflict between the remaining unshared elements of the two cultures.

Cultural translators play a key role in promoting dual socialization. According to de Anda "a translator is an individual from the minority person's own ethnic or cultural group who has undergone the dual socialization experience with considerable success" (1984, pp. 103–104). The translator is then able to pass on his/her experiences and facilitate understanding of the values and perceptions of the majority culture in ways which do not compromise his/her own ethnic values and norms. Thus, de Anda contends, the increasing success of each successive generation depends not so much on the degree of assimilation as an increase in the number of translators available (1984, p. 104). For example, "the stress inherent in the demands placed on the minority student entering an institution of higher edu-

cation can be mitigated by the presence of a translator who has successfully dealt with these pressures" (1984, p. 104).

"Mediators are individuals in the mainstream culture who serve as providers of information and guides for ethnic minority persons. They may be persons who serve formal socializing functions such as teachers, counselors and social workers, or be informal agents of socialization such as peers and mentors" (de Anda, 1984, p. 104). Mediators, unlike translators cannot offer extensive information about the points of convergence and divergence between the two cultures or methods for dealing with the resulting value conflicts.

Models are individuals in the minority person's environment whose behavior serves as a pattern to emulate in order to develop a behavioral repertoire consistent with the majority or minority culture (de Anda, 1984, p. 104). Moreover, the modeling process can be enhanced by perceived similarity between the model and the observer and by the recognition of the model as controller of resources.

The Marginal Experience

According to Kerckhoff and McCormick (1955, p. 50) a marginal man is "one whose socialization has not been such to prepare him to play the role assigned him in the social sphere. There are forces preventing him from making his reference group a membership group." Identity change disturbs the formerly evolved balance between self identity and social identity. "Reality testing leading to restoration of centrality and gradual assumption of roles is the important task facing marginal identification. Preservation of the central core, or basic identity plot around which various personality identifications crystallize allows for gradual restoration of centrality" (Hammet, 1966, p. 2479). A major anxiety accompanying a rapid reconstitution of identity elements is a sense of losing the active choosing role which is essential to a sense of identity as a continuous biography of the past coupled with the anticipated future. Cultural assimilation into one or the other ethno-cultural groups presents a serious dilemma for biracial persons because it means sacrificing one or the other of their cultural frames of reference. Consequently, the struggle for biracial persons is related to adequately adjusting to and functioning within mainstream society without sacrificing the integrity of one's personal identity. De Anda's model of the cultural translator is potentially use-

ful here. Does one dissociate oneself from the victims and associate with the aggressors in order to gain mastery over the dilemmas of survival?

Due to the constant ambiguity of their status, marginal persons are likely to be less autonomous and more dependent upon others' perceptions and external definitions of status when constructing a self concept than one who is not marginal. However, stabilizing this ambivalent position is a most difficult choice. Moreover, the difficulty is compounded by mainstream society's failure to understand and appreciate these kinds of fundamental differences.

Stonequist (1937) was among the first to describe the "marginal personality" as a broad composite of possible features. However, individuals in marginal circumstances will not necessarily experience all these characteristics. The degree and intensity depend upon both the person and the situation. Moreover, temperament, intelligence and personal predispositions will also affect the intensity of the marginal experience. These factors notwithstanding, Peter Watson (1973, p. 33) aptly describes the marginal personality:

> "The marginal man sees himself from two conflicting points of view: those of two groups between which he is poised: so that he experiences a divided loyalty and ambivalence (dual consciousness and identity). This ambivalence is at the root of the traits characterizing the marginal man and may well explain the apparently fluctuating, irrational, moody, temperamental conduct typical of him. Because his status is often called into question, he becomes excessively self-conscious and race-conscious. Made to feel unacceptable, he develops inferiority feelings for which he may compensate by becoming egocentric or pushing or by rationalizing or daydreaming. Self consciously seeing himself through the eyes of others he tends toward hyper-sensitivity. Combining the knowledge of the insider with the skeptical attitude of the outsider, he may develop into an able critic of the dominant group and its culture. His perplexities are likely to make him a particularly reflective person, although the hyperactive thinking may be more conformist than creative because of his craving to fit himself to the ways approved by the dominant culture."

Moreover, the biracial person must adjust to two or more social selves. Stonequist found that the index of racial maladjustment was high for students who because of their physical appearance were likely to be mistaken for members of White, Indian or Mexican groups (Stonequist, 1937).

Social structure sets limits on individual variation. If individuals

are ostracized because of race, then they are consequently excluded from spheres of social activity and the formal and informal networks of group relationships. These, often subtle, forms of social exclusion and avoidance are among the most painful for the marginal person.

According to Howard Ehrlich (1973, p. 10), the child's developmental challenge is threefold:

1) learning the major social categories in a community and society;
2) learning certain criteria by which people are classified as members or non-members of a category;
3) learning modes of attitudinal and behavioral response to classes of people.

This developmental learning serves as a basis for classifying self and others within the group context.

Stonequist asserts that "It is the growing awareness of the lines and barriers of the adult world which produces the typical characteristics of the marginal man" (1937, p. 130). The marginal status lies between two groups which are at differing prestige levels within society. The higher prestige group classifies marginal status as belonging to the lower or to an intermediate prestige group. "The tendency for a person to identify with the dominant group increases with the permeability of the barrier confronting him. The greatest incidence of marginal characteristics would occur in those individuals who are inclined to identify with the dominant group but encounter a relatively impermeable barrier. If the barrier is relatively permeable, identification with the dominant group creates less stress related to marginality. The differences in the permeability of an individual's barrier are less important if his identification is with the subgroup although some individual problems do arise from relationships with the subgroup and its barriers" (Kerchoff and McCormick, 1955, pp. 54–55).

Biracial individuals internalize mainstream identity standards in spite of failing to conform to them. Consequently, feelings of ambivalence around their own identity inevitably emerge. The result of feeling socially, culturally and racially inferior often produces a constant striving to excel and thus prove that one is just as good or better than anybody else. Although this overcompensation is intended to ward off impending social messages of inferiority, it is frequently interpreted as arrogance and self aggrandizement by majority group members and consequently proves counterproductive. This reaction is partic-

ularly acute when biracial persons find themselves in direct competition with Whites. Losing symbolizes being put in a "one down" position relative to majority persons and thereby reiterates deleterious social messages of inferiority.

Social marginality involves differential treatment by members of the dominant population with the intentional or unintentional support of the entire group/culture. It may include displays of prejudice, hostility, avoidance, rejection, stereotyping or discrimination by subordinate ethnic as well as dominant groups.

The most salient aspect of social influence is the phenomenon of convergence (which applies to moral judgments, tastes, values, motives, etc.). This interchange attempts to reconcile discrepancies between individual and group behavior and produce a state of equilibrium. Anxiety, insecurity and disorientation can result from experiencing two conflicting and equally coherent informational structures concerning the same phenomenon. In the case of the biracial person, information concerning status and identity is received from two primary and valued cultural groups. In order to resolve this cognitive dissonance, there is a strong drive to stabilize and identify with either one group or the other. As Kerckhoff and McCormick (1955, pp. 54–55) put it there is:

> ". . . a drive in human beings to test the validity not only of their self image, but also of their judgments and opinions concerning the outside world. When sensory means for such an evaluation are reduced, the individual turns to his social environment. Information gathered from social sources will be assimilated in various ways, depending on its relation to the individual's need for achieving a stable system of opinions, attitudes, judgments, perceptions and self-evaluations. A discrepancy produces tendencies both to change one's position so as to move closer to others in the group and to change others in the group."

Marginal persons are especially vulnerable to the convergence phenomenon because of their ambiguous status. As with all people, they are motivated to behave in a manner consistent with the expectations of their referent group. However, therein lies the dilemma for biracial individuals. Marginal behavior may conform to the learned stereotypes of reference group expectations. According to Stonequist, the strength of the motivation to conform depends upon: (1937, p. 122)

1) the relationship of the individual to the group;
2) the faith that the individual has in the correctness or adequacy of his own responses and of group responses;

3) the individual's level of awareness of perceived differences between his behavior and group behavior.

However, there are affective complications engendered by this conformity. Agreement may occur for reasons other than shared goals (e.g. insecurity, need for approval, fear of hostility, etc.) "The less an individual is accepted by a group and the stronger his motivation to be accepted, the more likely he is to produce incorrect judgments in accordance with the judgments of the group. When the marginal person begins to detect discrepancies in the information or credibility of his communicators, he can more easily dissociate himself from dominant or subordinate identification and begin to stabilize his ambiguous state" (Cavell, 1977, p. 9).

The Impact of Stigma

> "Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group" (Allport, 1954, p. 10).

Social stigma is a central facet of biracial life. Relative levels of social acceptance or rejection deeply influence the biracial identity not only in the early formative years, but throughout one's life. The seminal work of Erving Goffman is extremely illuminating when analyzing the impact and implications of (social) stigma.

According to Goffman, "society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural to members of each of these categories. Moreover, the routine of social intercourse in established settings allows us to deal with anticipated others without special attention or thought" (Goffman, 1963, p. 2). For example, when a stranger enters our presence first appearances are likely to enable us to anticipate her category and attributes (i.e. her social identity). However, what happens when that stranger possesses some attribute which makes her different from others in the category of persons available for her to be? Let's further suppose that this particular attribute is of the less desirable variety. Goffman further suggests that this person is then reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one depending upon the nature and severity of the attribute (1963). Though sometimes referred to as a failing, a shortcoming or a hand-

icap, this discrediting attribute becomes a stigma. Goffman (1963, p. 4) delineates three different types of stigma:

1) Abominations of the body—physical handicaps or deformities.
2) Blemishes of individual character—dishonesty, addiction, criminal behavior, etc.
3) Tribal stigma—race, nation, religion, etc.

However, it is important to note that at many levels the stigmatized individual has internalized some of the same beliefs about identity as mainstream society. To paraphrase Goffman—his deepest feelings about what he is may be his sense of being a "normal person," a human being like anyone else, a person and therefore deserving of the same chances and same breaks as everyone else (1963). One of the most poignant scenes from the recent movie, *The Elephant Man* (1982), poignantly illustrates this point:

> After being chased throughout the train station by a curious and hostile mob, the "elephant man" finds himself cornered with no apparent escape. Fully aware that the mob sees him only as a sideshow freak the "elephant man" turns on the mob and yells out in his desperation "I am a human being!!"

This then is Merrick's ultimate defense. That he is not to be judged only by his stigma, because beneath his deformity he is one of them.

"Those who have dealings with him (the stigmatized individual) fail to accord him the respect and regard which the "uncontaminated" aspects of his social identity have led them to anticipate extending and have lead him to anticipate receiving . . ." (Goffman, 1963, pp. 8–9). And how do stigmatized individuals cope with it? They frequently attempt to correct the condition directly or indirectly. However, if the stigma is based upon race, then the attribute is generally "incorrectable." Despite this fact, efforts are often made to attempt to minimize the stigmatizing characteristics (e.g. being Black) by any number of cosmetic changes designed to make the Black person more acceptable to White society by trying to look, speak and act more "White." This represents the pathos of stigma. The other option for those whose (racial) category is not immediately apparent is "passing" as a majority group member. However, passing is only a viable option for those biracial persons who are able to convincingly conceal their stigmatizing characteristics and ostensibly assimilate into the mainstream.

There are visible signs which immediately signify a person's status not only within a particular group but relative to other groups. In its extreme these symbols are sometimes partially or incorrectly affected as part of the stigmatized person's behavioral repertoire. Take, for example, lower class Southern Blacks who affect Northern White middle class speech patterns so as to attempt to feign an image of higher status and education. In our class conscious society, visible symbols of prestige and status are frequently used to attempt to offset stigmatizing symbols.

The Interpersonal Style of the Biracial Person within Minority Groups

Due to the shared experience of racial or ethnic marginality, the biracial person will typically function more comfortably within minority groups than majority groups. However, because of his or her dual racial membership, the biracial person will not usually be fully accepted as a regular group member. The degree of social acceptance will depend upon how closely the biracial person's physical appearance, speech patterns, social style, etc. match those of the minority group. For example, for biracial Blacks whose physical appearance and socialization are readily identifiable as Black, the degree of social acceptance will be high (high congruence). However, if the biracial person is not readily categorizable in terms of race and ethnicity, then the relative degree of social acceptance will be more problematic (low congruence). Nevertheless, since most Blacks in the U.S. are interracial, the acceptable range of physical, social, and cultural characteristics is much broader than within mainstream society. Moreover, the overall level of tolerance for ethnic and cultural differences is often higher within the Black community in general. (However, it should noted that a substantial difference exists between interracial Blacks in general and "mulattoes" in terms of their relative cultural identifications and experiences.)

The Interpersonal Style of the Biracial Person within Majority Groups

If the interpersonal style of Blacks is puzzling to most Whites, then the interpersonal style of biracial individuals is even more enigmatic.

Given that the cognitive and emotional development, interpersonal style, values, perceptions and attitudes are not specifically Black or White per se (but rather are a hybrid of these two cultural frames of reference) the stage is set for a wealth of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

In the U.S., all children are exposed to a master belief and concept regarding race relations (ie. "White superiority"). This concept is further reinforced by the Protestant work ethic, orientation toward the future and the belief that all good things are in short supply and must be distributed according to merit, competition and property ownership (Cavell, 1977). Subordination and physical segregation are characteristic of American ethnocentrism. Sharp definitions of membership and social boundaries exist. This engenders a substantial degree of status anxiety which characterizes the marginal experience. The core traits which characterize the biracial person arise from the nature of intergroup relations, not the specific cultural content within particular groups. Each group, especially the one in power, seeks to protect itself by keeping the other in its place and maintaining social distance. The significance of ethnic differences and characteristics is thus a matter of social definition. Physical segregation is one major societal mechanism which minimizes the likelihood of attitudinal change. However, the maintenance of social and personal distance is a reciprocal process in which both groups (mainstream and marginal) participate. Social distance norms between groups are learned early. Several important dimensions characterize these group norms. These include legitimacy, power, visibility, sanctions and centrality of social relationships. (Cavell, 1977). Stonequist (1937) noted that "the significant feature of the American problem is the unwillingness of the white man to make any distinction between mixed bloods and full bloods." Consequently, the status and role of biracial persons is inextricably intertwined with the larger issue of racism. The complex web of individual, institutional and cultural racism perpetuates distinct status differentials for non-White people. Therefore, biracial persons experience all of the impact of being non-White in a White society without being accorded full membership in their particular minority group. Moreover, the assignment of ethnic group membership to a given individual usually precedes the development of a set of behavioral intentions directed toward that individual. Consequently, an individual belonging to a group or category which is negatively valued by the surrounding society will experience less strain in maintaining

a positive identity if he or she accepts the negative valuation (Cavell, 1977).

Conclusion

Despite our prevailing cultural mythology to the contrary, the underlying issue for mainsteam (U.S.) society relates to their inability to comprehend and appreciate the fuller implications of biracial identity. To expect biracial persons to behave like either Blacks or Whites is unrealistic. Given their unique developmental history coupled with the fact that they do not fit neatly into either category it would seem more appropriate to assess biracial persons on the basis of their dual frames of reference rather than try to stereotype or miscategorize them. The interpersonal styles of biracial persons are somewhat idiosyncratic. Moreover, biracial persons have become accustomed to occupying a marginal position relative to group norms. Although their often outspoken and contentious social style no doubt appears deviant to Whites, there are substantive reasons why such a style has developed. This interpersonal style is intimately related to their unique cultural and ethnic history. Moreover, to stigmatize and discriminate on the basis of their differing values, attitudes, perceptions or interpersonal style constitutes discrimination based on race. Almost by definition, biracial persons have very different feelings and perceptions about the need to conform to group norms. Their characterological posture in relation to White mainstream groups is characterized by healthy suspicion and mistrust borne of past experience.

Furthermore, biracial persons are frequently scapegoated within predominantly White groups, organizations and institutions. Rather than acknowledge and address their own stereotypes and ethnocentrism, Whites will frequently deny and project negative attributes onto the biracial person. This denial and projection process implies that such differences are less than (not as good as) White standards. The accompanying social stigma discredits biracial persons and sets up an ongoing pattern of social exclusion and "invisibility" not unlike the type described in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The biracial person then reacts to this unfair exclusion by enhancing his or her efforts at achieving credibility/acceptability. Naturally, these efforts only further exacerbate the problem because it further reinforces the mistaken conclusion that the biracial person *is* the problem. As a re-

sult, these Whites further discredit and exclude the biracial person. Consequently, social interactions with mainstream Whites becomes paradoxical.

> "The apparently irrational, moody, temperamental conduct of racial hybrids is often paralleled among racially pure cultural hybrids, but the lack of obvious biological differences has made such explanations and analysis less applicable in their case. Biracial individuals are conscious of their anomalous position between two cultures and their attention is repeatedly focused on each group attitude and their relationship to it. This continual calling in question of his racial status naturally turns his attention upon himself to an excessive degree (Stonequist, 1937, p. 222).

Moreover, this painful discrepancy between one's personal and social identity will remain a source of conflict and anxiety so long as the status differences between White and non-White races/cultures endures. However, as Stonequist so eloquently puts it:

> ". . . the life histories of marginal men offer the most significant material for the analysis of the cultural process as it springs from the contacts of social groups. And it is in the mind of the marginal man that the inner significance and the driving motives of such cultural changes are most luminously revealed" (Stonequist, 1937, p. 222).

Biracial people constitute a unique racial group which contains elements of both parent races while being specifically unlike either. The "colored" of South Africa, "metis" of Brazil, and other racial hybrids the world over, are recognized as separate and distinct racial groups. Is it therefore necessary for biracial people in the U.S. to be recognized as a distinct racial category before both mainstream and minority society can acknowledge and affirm us?

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