

**Shifting Perspectives:**

How Capetonian Racial Identities Have Been Shaped By The Abolition of Apartheid in The Republic of South Africa

Channing Gerard Joseph  
The 10<sup>th</sup> of December, 2001  
The University of the Western Cape

**Contents:**

Rationale  
Research Questions  
Definitions of Terms Used In Study  
Research Aim  
Results Expected Prior To Study  
Methodology and Theoretical Framework  
Method of Data Interpretation  
Results and Analysis  
Discussion  
Conclusions  
Possible Errors and Ways To Improve Study  
Ethical Problems  
Interview Questions  
Works Cited

**Rationale:**

Considering the strong relationship between identity politics and movements for justice and liberation, the question interests me as to whether or not the shift of political power in the Republic of South Africa, as well as the radical change that has come within recent years, has affected the prevailing attitudes among South Africans about racial identity and race relations.

Through my own life experience, I have realized that in the United States, which has been free from legalized segregation for several decades now, there is still much controversy over issues of race and ethnicity, and that much of this controversy seems to be fueled by the significant difference between the racial attitudes and racially -related experiences of youth and of older generations in that country.

Being from an American racial minority myself, I was also curious as to the dynamics of a society where people from white European ancestry are at the political whim of a black African majority, the opposite of the situation I have grown up within the United States. I wondered whether the responses from participants might be similar or different from what I may have presumed from my personal experience of race dynamics in America.

**Research Questions:**

- How has the abolition of apartheid shaped South Africans' notions of their own identity?
- How do notions of identity differ between generations who experienced apartheid and those who are now too young to remember it in their lives?
- How do these notions compare and contrast across ethnic lines, specifically Afrikaans -speaking white, colored mixed -race, and Xhosa lines? (*Afrikaans-speaking white, colored, Xhosa written in alphabetical order*).
- Have traditionally underprivileged groups internalized the racism inherent in the now -abolished apartheid system?
- What does being a citizen of South Africa mean for apartheid -discriminated groups (*specifically Xhosa and mixed -race people*) as compared with apartheid privileged groups (*namely Afrikaans -speaking white people*)?
- Is there optimism for future growth, stability, and/or prosperity for the Afrikaans -speaking white, the colored person, and the Xhosa person?

**Definitions of Terms Used In This Study:**

- *Identity*: 2. The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.
- *Race*: 1. A local geographic or global human population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically transmitted physical characteristics. 2. A group of people united or classified together on the basis of common history, nationality, or geographic distribution: *the German race*.

- *Racism*: Whatever the subject might perceive to be racism, as the term was purposefully never defined during the interview/questioning process. Most subjects used definitions in the range of: discrimination on the basis of race, racial prejudice, racial abuse, racial hatred, etc.
- *Apartheid*: 1. An official policy of racial segregation formerly practiced in the Republic of South Africa, involving political, legal, and economic discrimination against nonwhites.

### Research Aim:

My aim is to find answers to the following questions:

- How valuable is it to identify or to be identified as an Afrikaans -speaking white in post-apartheid South Africa?
- How valuable is it to identify or to be identified as a colored person under the same circumstances?
- How valuable is it to identify or to be identified as a Xhosa person under the same circumstances?
- What challenges or privileges has each group -identified person confronted or been confronted with previously and since the abolition of the apartheid regime?
- How do varying notions of identity affect each person's choice of career, leisure activities, traditions, choice of romantic partner, spirituality, political views, life expectancy, ambitions, and hopes for their progeny?
- How has the media helped to define these identities?

### Results Expected Prior To The Study:

- those people who do not remember apartheid will be more well -adjusted to the idea of a multi-cultural South Africa and will identify more strongly with notions of nationality than with apartheid -determined race classifications.
- these younger people will be less politicized in their views in general.
- conversely, older people who do remember experiencing the direct influence of apartheid in their lives will be less adjusted to the idea of a multi -cultural society and will be less comfortable identifying with the idea of a truly post -apartheid, multicultural South Africa.
- these older people will also be more politicized in their views in general.
- underprivileged groups, as well as privileged ones, will likely show evidence of having internalized many of the racist views of apartheid ideology, displayed in their dress, speech, voting habits, etc. This may, as a result, be a factor influencing their conception of their place within a post -apartheid, multicultural South Africa.

### Methodology:

The data for this study of Capetonians' attitudes toward race was gathered mainly from audio -taped, one -on -one interviews conducted by myself with willing participants from each category under study, though data from questionnaires filled out by willing participants not in my presence were also used and given the same weight in the study as the aforementioned interviews.

The study was two -fold, measuring generational differences between different racial groups, i.e. the attitudes of older persons (26 years old or older) versus younger persons (between the ages of 16 and 25), as well as measuring differences in attitudes between the three racial categories under study: the Afrikaans-speaking white group, the colored group, and the black group of Xhosa culture.

The study was limited to these groups, because of my own knowledge of colored South Africans, the population prevalence of Xhosa people in Cape Town over other black cultures, and because the previous privileges of Afrikaans -speaking whites within South African society.

The attempt was made to interview 3 male and 3 female persons from each race and each age category, resulting in 36 interviews. However, this was not logistically feasible, and the data here in are the result of 29 interviews with: 3 Afrikaans -speaking white males and 2 Afrikaans -speaking females 26 or older, 3 Afrikaans -speaking males and 3 Afrikaans -speaking females 16 to 25, 2 colored males and 3 colored females 26 or older, 3 colored males and 3 colored females 16 to 25, 1 Xhosa male and 3 Xhosa females 26 or older, and 0 Xhosa males and 3 Xhosa females 16 to 25.

No importance was given to the economic status, the physical residence, the political views of the participants, my own familiarity or social ties to the participant, nor to the physical location of the one -on -one interviews.

Also, many of the survey questions did not yield important data to demonstrate significant differences between the responses of each group, or rather, the responses were nearly identical for everyone surveyed. For example, nearly everyone claimed pride in being South African, the importance of Christianity in their lives, and a feeling that the media was attempting to show South Africans how different race groups might get along together. Hence, the results of this data have not been included within this study's analysis.

**Method of Data Interpretation:**

To more easily interpret the survey results, specific questions were grouped with others of similar themes. For example, for questions #10, #12, #14, and #15 were grouped together because they all relate to the respondent's relative optimism or pessimism about the future of race relations in South Africa.

#10:

Is there less racism or more racism in South Africa today than a few years ago? **LESS, SAME, MORE**

#12:

Is it possible for the different race groups in South Africa to live in complete harmony? **YES NO**

#14:

Will racism ever go away? **YES NO** If so, how many years in the future? \_\_\_\_\_ years.

Will your children or your grandchildren ever live in a truly non-racist South Africa? **YES NO**

#15:

How optimistic are you that this will become true? Circle one: **1) VERY OPTIMISTIC, 2) OPTIMISTIC, 3) NEITHER OPTIMISTIC NOR PESSIMISTIC, 4) PESSIMISTIC, 5) VERY PESSIMISTIC.**

If a respondent answered question #10 with "LESS," the respondent was given a score of "+1" for their optimism regarding future relations. If the same respondent answered question #10 with "SAME," then they scored a "0," while "MORE" scored a "-1." Similarly, for question #12, a score of "+1" was given for a response of "YES," "-1" for "NO," and, during one-on-one interviews if the respondent seemed unsure, "0" for "UNSURE." For question #14, a score of "+1" was given for a "YES" response to either sub-question. For question #15, a score of "+1" was given for both "VERY OPTIMISTIC" and "OPTIMISTIC," a score of "0" for "NEITHER OPTIMISTIC NOR PESSIMISTIC," and a score of "-1" for both "PESSIMISTIC" and "VERY PESSIMISTIC."

After a respondent's scores had been recorded for each above question, they were summed together to their total score, which was then interpreted to represent the respondent's general outlook for the future of race relations in South Africa. The higher the score, the more optimism was inferred; the lower the score, the less optimism was inferred. The data was then graphed (see Figure 1) for better interpretation of the meaning of the responses from all the participants in each specified race and age group.

A similar process was undertaken to create Figures 2 through 6.

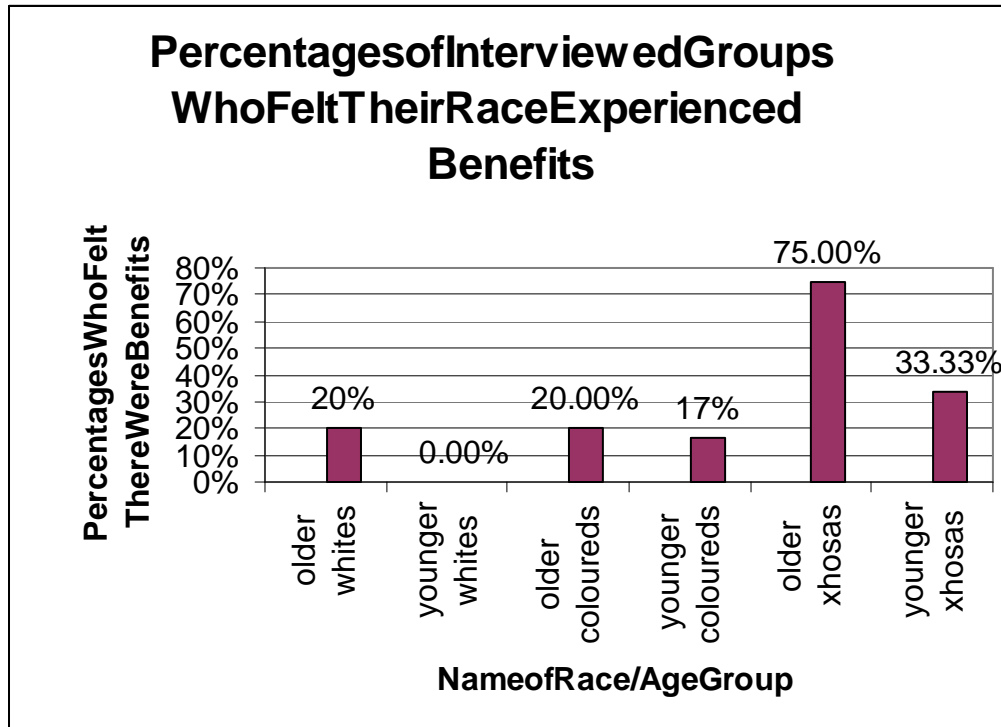


Figure 1.

#### Results and Analysis:

Of those surveyed, there was a consistently high tendency among the older generation to testify that there were benefits for people of their particular racial group, though this tendency was particularly marked in the Afrikaans-speaking white group and the Xhosa group, whose older members scored respectively 20 and 42 percentage points more than their younger counterparts. The difference was not so marked in the colored group, whose older members scored only 3 percentage points more than their younger counterparts in the number of members who believed that their group experienced benefits due to their racial classification.

More generally speaking, the older Xhosa group scored highest in the number of members who felt there were benefits to being a member of their race, and the younger Afrikaans-speaking whites scored lowest in this respect, with each group scoring 75% and 0%, respectively.

As for explanation, these results seem consistent with the history of apartheid and with personal testimonials from each group about their particular race-related life experiences. For example, the older Afrikaans-speaking whites were among those who benefited most from the previous apartheid regime, which privileged them socially and economically over the other residing groups in South Africa. To explain this, one might offer that some of the respondents are still experiencing some of the more long-term or long-lasting effects of the previous white-supremacist government, such as "Afrikaner pride" and the previous job preferences that may have secured them high economic status. Such pride and economic status may give older Afrikaans-speaking whites a sense of racial privilege that very few younger whites feel in the face of a legalized affirmative action, which shuts off such economic opportunities for them. Given this lack of current privilege, they may feel doubly cheated while they compare themselves to the older generation of their parents and grandparents, many of whom have taken good advantage of the opportunities afforded them prior to the 1994 change of government.

Similarly, many older coloreds may have also been given an advantage over black South Africans during the apartheid era, and perhaps some of them are still experiencing some of the longer-term effects of these advantages over the oppressed groups. Consequently, this may explain their slightly higher percentage than the younger colored generation in feeling that their race group experiences benefits, though the standing difference of 3% is not statistically significant.

In light of this explanation, the older Xhosa generation's much higher score than the younger Xhosa group may seem contradictory, as it does not seem intuitively obvious that older Xhosas, who

experienced extremely few, if any, benefits during the apartheid era, would see their race as benefited now for the same reasons that the white or colored groups might. Yet, perhaps it is because of this memory of their apartheid-era lack of privilege that such current privileges might seem more important and more special to them than to the younger generation of Xhosa, whomay not feel the same gratitude for the current social and economic preferences of legalized corrective action.

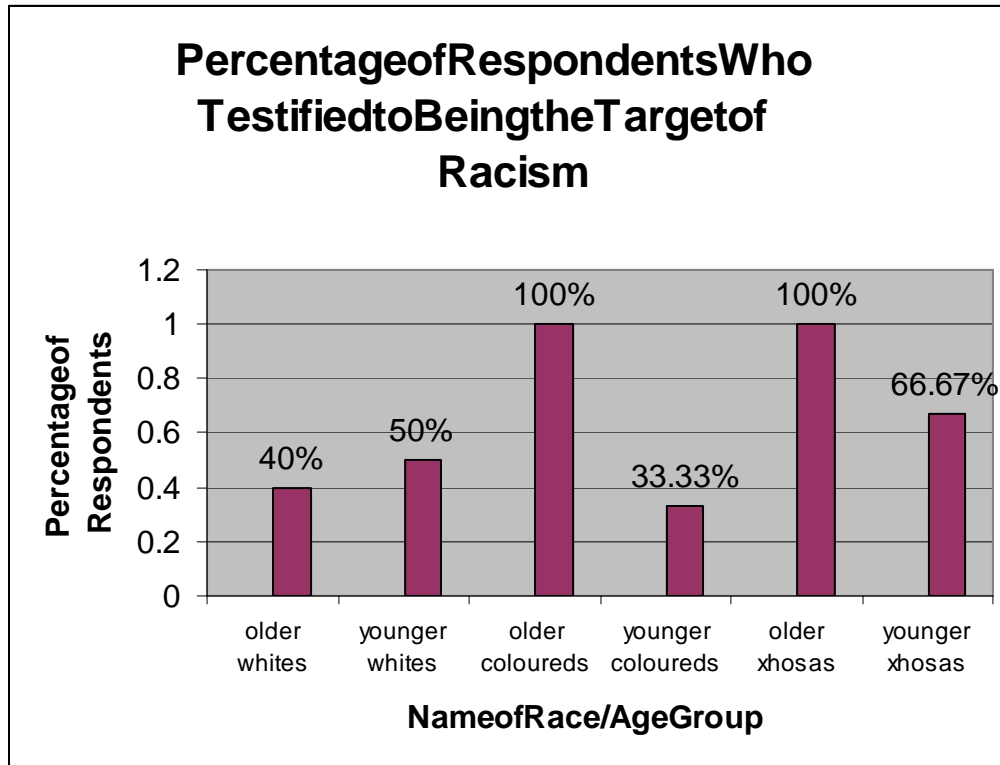


Figure 2.

As one might expect from the history of apartheid, 100% of both the older colored group and the older Xhosa group testified to having been the target of racism at some point in their lives, while the results from the younger colored group and the younger Xhosa group were significantly lower than their older counterparts, being 33.33% and 66.67%, respectively.

ults

The responses of white Afrikaans-speaking people were not completely expected and were not in keeping with the results of their differently-raced compatriots. A greater percentage of the younger generation of white Afrikaans-speaking people testified to having been the target of racism than their older counterparts, with groups demonstrating 50% and 40%, respectively.

Such results, however, are consistent with the fact that 0% of younger whites testified to seeing benefits in being a member of their race, while 20% of older whites did see such benefits. The testimony of younger whites to having personally experienced more racism than their older counterparts is consistent with the testimony that these younger white people see fewer benefits to being a member of their race.

Similarly, the results of the colored and Xhosa groups from the previous figure are also consistent with the results of Figure 2, as both the Xhosa and the colored groups testified to a decrease in the experience of racism, as shown in Figure 2, as well as a higher likelihood of seeing benefits in being a member of their race.

The generational decline in the reported incidence of being targeted for racism was significantly sharper for members of the colored group than for members of the Xhosa group, the declines standing at 66.67% and 33.33%, respectively.

Explanations for this may be that the distinct cultural differences between Xhosa people and white or colored people may result in more exacerbated forms of discrimination, prejudice, and/or abuse during their interactions with other races than white or colored people may experience in their interactions with other races. This does not explain, however, why white or colored people would not experience similar discrimination and abuse during their interactions with Xhosa or other black people, and the speculative explanation may be that whites and coloreds more often find themselves in a position of authority or control over Xhosa people than they find themselves under the command or authority of a Xhosa person, or even on equal terms with a Xhosa person. This power dynamic may result that Xhosa people find themselves in obligatory positions of deference and obedience to coloreds and whites, as in the places of

business and employment, which provide little opportunity to discriminate against the races or to abuse them with impunity.

Consequently, there would be opportunity for a greater incidence of racial targeting against Xhosa people than against other groups.