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UMSAEP report on visit to UWC  
10-21 Sept. 2010

A multifold project in collaboration with Drs. Kelvin Mwaba (Psychology) and Nicolette Roman (Social Work) which focuses on racial/ethnic identity, experiences with racism, and mental health outcomes within the South African Coloured community has been initiated. The objectives of the current project are to: 1) assess the validity of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) adapted for a coloured South African population (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997); 2) assess the validity of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) also adapted for a coloured South African sample; 3) explore the relationship between racial and ethnic identity, experiences with racism, and mental health outcomes (self-esteem, anxiety, and depression) for a coloured South African sample; and 4) compare matched samples of South African colouers and American biracials on racial/ethnic identity, experiences with racism, and mental health outcomes.

My travel to Cape Town and subsequent meetings at UWC represented the preparatory elements of this work. One aspect of this involved the convening of four (4) focus groups of ten (10) self-identified coloured South African adult participants (n = 40). The purpose of the focus groups was to: 1) gather general information about the current conceptualization of coloured identity; 2) obtain information to aid in the culturally-appropriate adaptation of the instrumentation; and 3) process with individuals who are representative of the target population as to the best way to recruit participants and collect data (e.g., in-person interviews, online survey, pencil-paper, etc…) for the previously noted sub-studies.

Meetings early in the visit were focused on finalizing the focus group protocols. We completed preparation of questions and logistical arrangements for the groups. Two 90-minute focus groups and post-group meals took place mid-visit in the community of Mitchell’s Plain, a largely Coloured township about 20 km from Cape Town, and were facilitated by myself, Dr. Roman, and a research assistant from UWC. Another 2 groups were planned to be done on UWC’s campus with coloured students and facilitated by Dr. Roman and the research assistant. I also participated in a number of more informal meetings and discussion with elders and other members of the Coloured community as well as a visit to the District 6 museum to acquire a better understanding of the relevant history, present-day realities, and perceived future of the group though their own analyses. Some data from the focus groups are in the process of being analyzed and will be presented at the 2011 American Psychological
Association convention and later developed into a manuscript.

Building upon progress made during Mwaba and Roman’s visit to St. Louis in May 2010, we also finalized the instrumentation and procedures for the quantitative arm of the project. A great deal of focus was spent trying to maneuver around logistical issues, namely the potential ethics of only having coloured students complete instrumentation, given our utilization of classroom settings to collect data. We developed a number of instrument adaptations whereby all students could respond to the items and relate them to their own culture of origin. The final stages of instrumentation development (e.g., typing and distribution) are currently underway. There are still some financial issues to work out, such as how to provide my South Africa colleagues with the budgeted grant monies from here to finalize these developments and pay the research assistants. We anticipate the quantitative data to be collect by mid-March. Presentations will be given at regional and national conferences both here in the US and South Africa, in addition to the development of manuscripts for journals focused on identity, race and ethnicity, and minority psychology.

There was also an opportunity for me to provide a guest lecture on multiracial identity development and the project to Dr. Mwaba’s graduate seminar course in psychology. Additionally, I had a meeting with Professor Jan Persens, the Director of the International Relations Office for UWC. I provided him and update on my travel, the collaborative project, and engaged in some general discussion about the fruitfulness of the UM-UWC partnership program.

In sum, the time in Cape Town built upon the head start provided by countless email and videoconference calls. The time in country provided the face-to-face elements needed to finalize the project and, more importantly, provided me with a better understanding of the nuanced contextual and cultural themes which impact the study and its participants.

Regards,

Matthew