

# Am I Enough?

## A Multi-Race Teacher's Experience In-Between Contested Race, Gender, Class, and Power

SONIA JANIS  
*University of Georgia*

**I** AM NOT WHITE. I am not Black. I am mixed. I am one half Polish, one quarter Russian, and one-quarter Japanese. I was born, raised, and educated in public schools in the suburbs of Chicago, and then abruptly transitioned to public schools located in north Alabama when I was an adolescent. My inquiry explores my mixed race experience of childhood, adolescence, college years, teaching and administration positions, pursuing curriculum studies, and working as a pre-service teacher educator in a predominantly White institution. My inquiry explores the spaces in-between race and place from my perspective as an educator who is multiracial and/or hapa according to the latest race-based verbiage. I search for language to portray the experience of people of mixed race such as myself and come across a long list of such words as: Afroasian, Ainoko, Ameriasian, biracial, Eurasian, Haafu, half-breed, hapa haole or hapa, griffe, melange, mestizo(a), miscegenation, mixie, mono-racial, mulatto(a), multiracial, octoroon, quadroon, spurious issue, trans-racial, and zebra (Broyard, 2007; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2001; Root, 1996a; Spencer, 1999). I find that most of these words, whether they are verbs, nouns, or adjectives, have negative connotations. I use “multiracial,” “biracial,” and “mixed race” interchangeably throughout my writing.

As I reflect on my experience as a seventh grade student, a public school administrator, and now as a pre-service teacher educator in a predominantly White institution, I explore my rememory (Morrison, 1990) of lives in two distinct regions of the United States: the Midwest and the South. Many of the stories take place in the South, a culturally distinct part of the United States with a unique history of race. This history revolves almost exclusively around the interactions between people described by the simplified racial duality of White and Black. Though other races are recognized in the South, the United States, and the rest of the world, the emphasis on the duality of Black and White relations remains poignantly more significant in the Southeastern region of the United States. These Black and White, inevitably racist, relations are still engulfed in the everyday experience of people living in the South resulting in an unexplainable and immeasurable divide. I feel abandoned in a wedge-shaped space in-between

Black and White race. As I cross this divide in my social and political surroundings, I find myself back, forth, and in-between this divide, entrenched in a duality that excludes me on a daily, if not hourly, basis, sometimes by force, and other times by choice. Perpetually tying racial tensions exclusively to Black and White races is only one of the ways malpracticed multicultural education, especially in the South, has exploited a liberating theory of multiculturalism. My experiences challenging this divide, personifies how multiculturalism remains marginalized in a confining Black and White duality of the social construction of race. I constantly imagine the spaces beyond Black and White (Seller & Weis, 1997).

Into which category does my experience fit? Does my experience have a category? Is my experience in many different categories? Or is my experience in-between categories? If my experience is in-between, what categories is it in-between? One's space in-between can be explored by, from, and through the voices of others who experience contradictory spaces regarding race, gender, sexuality, power, ethnicity, and class (e.g., Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; He, 2003, 2010). Recognizing the fluidity of lived experiences, He (2003) unfolded an inquiry into cross-cultural lives of three women living in-between two continents that tried to "make sense of 'in-betweenness'" (p. 2). He's (2010) exploration into in-betweenness continues as she delves into her experience as an academic with cultural, geographical, linguistic, and historical awakening in-between exiled spaces. My inquiry explores my experience in a contested space, in-between race and place, as a multiracial female residing in-between the Midwest and the South. Acknowledging lived experience in-between race and place, I hope that other educators are challenged to explore their own undefined experiences along with those of their students.

The mainstream literature in multiculturalism tends either to romanticize a seemingly noble effort to improve school with the intent "to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates...content, concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women's studies" (Banks & Banks, 2004, p. xii) or to fail to unearth rooted negative beliefs associated with racial and cultural differences in the United States. Further, multiculturalism has done little to address the contested spaces of living in-between races as a multiracial individual.

During my work in public schools, I have come to believe that multicultural education has not created a form of cultural emancipation. Rather, it has been distorted into another long and meaningless list of pedagogical mandates for educators to check off. For example, a school holds a Black history assembly or devotes time to design bulletin boards that celebrate each racial and/or ethnic group's designated "history month." I, however, wonder whether the students understand why these groups are celebrated in a different, fractured, menial fashion in comparison with their cultures or the predominant Whiteness. I also wonder those exclusive and segregated celebrations perpetuate other ways to impose, simplify, stereotype, or alienate non-white and unprivileged individuals and groups. I, further, wonder whether this seemingly lofty, but empty, so called multicultural education liberates or further marginalizes disenfranchised and invisible individuals, groups, and communities.

As a multiracial educator, who is a proponent of the ideas and theories supporting multiculturalism, I feel anguished to know that I have not encountered any school that facilitates a multicultural space with an understanding of the liberating goal—cultural emancipation—as the driving force. This idealistic, but unmarked, goal of cultural emancipation is one route to problematize the social construction of race, along with its oppressive counterpart—racism. Rather than believing cultural emancipation is a possibility, my experiences reveal that schools view multicultural education as one more thing on their compliance list that they need to

demonstrate evidence of completing by the end of each routine school year. Celebrating cultural signifiers, such as food, clothing, customs, and festivals, is a widely utilized practice for fulfilling this requirement (Loutzenheiser, 2003). Is accomplishing the original reasoning, “educational equity for all,” behind adding “multicultural education” to schools’ lists of compliance even considered? I imagine it is added because a stakeholder with financial and/or political power expects multiculturalism to appear on the “highly effective list” without any rationale, just as a mandate. My inquiry is intended to challenge the shallow multicultural practices by revealing how misconceptions of race and culture have disguised themselves as cultural understanding and competence. These embedded and proliferating misunderstandings influence the daily experiences of young people from all cultural backgrounds to their detriment, and ultimately to our society’s damage.

### Autobiographical Roots of the Inquiry

Am I *enough*? Am I multiracial *enough*? Am I multicultural *enough*? These are the questions I am constantly asked. As a multi-race woman, I will never experience *enough* of one culture or race to validate my multiracial identity. When I began to develop a line of inquiry into my multiracial experience, I was working towards Ed. D. in Curriculum Studies at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. I was struggling to justify my tentative decision to use narrative inquiry to study my multi-race experience. Part of my struggle was related to a lack of concurrence within the field of curriculum studies about legitimation of the multi-race experience as a way to complicate the curriculum conversation. Another part of my struggle was to justify whether I was mixed-*enough*, multi-racial *enough*, and multi-cultural *enough* to research these areas of inquiry.

I was writing a research proposal as a final assignment in one of my summer doctorate courses. As the deadline for the assignment approached, I attended a three-day curriculum workshop with social studies teachers from across the state of Georgia. At one of our lunch breaks, I described my teaching position to my social studies colleagues. A White male teacher in his mid to late forties asked me what the racial dynamics were like at the school. I explained specific situations where race became apparent to me as a teacher in that community. After describing a couple circumstances from my classroom, I explained that the school community practiced racially segregated proms. He responded that the last segregated Georgia school prom was stopped the previous year. I explained, “Evidently, other schools across the state are still having segregated proms.” He then explained that he did not have a problem with racially segregated proms because the two “cultures’ are simply too different” (Falk, 2004, p. 138). He claimed to believe that they, Black and White students, would not have any reason to be at a social function like a dance together “anyway.”

I wanted to accuse, yell, and prove him wrong. But I simply froze. My emotions blocked my words. I wanted to say, “I’m biracial. Do you have a problem with that?” or “Where should I have gone to prom?” or “If I were Black, Asian, or Latina, would you say that to me?” or “Does your perception that I am White give you space to relate to me in a way that assumes that I am a member of a cultural group that thinks segregation is okay?” or “I’m married to a Black man. Is this wrong?” or “Why should my (potential) children have no prom?” or “Who are you to judge what is or is not culturally different for particular groups (Hermes, 2005)?” or “What kind of

teacher are you?” Every response that rushed through my brain and soul could not come out. I just froze.

I was struggling with questions about my motivations and legitimacy in researching and writing about multi-race experiences. Every time I sat down to write, I thought that all I had to say should be, “I am biracial.” That should be *enough*. Conversely, part of my struggle with solidifying a justification for choosing the multi-racial experience as my research topic. I was questioning my own beliefs about myself. I would ask: am I ethnic *enough* or multi-racial *enough* to write about being multi-racial? I now understand that as a multi-racial person, there is an ongoing search to figure out whether one is *enough*. I think encounters, like this one with my social studies colleague, are the only evidence I needed to justify that inquiry into my multi-racial experience. The lack of literature within the field of curriculum studies about the multi-race experience did not delegitimize my research. The gaps within the literature bolstered my belief that there is a need to research and write about what it means to live in-between the social constructions of race as a multi-racial person.

The conversation with my social studies colleague continued. When I defrosted the ice from my vocal chords, I referenced back to a scenario I already explained about a proportionately significant Hmong population recently migrating to the community. I told him, “The only problem with it [segregated proms] is that now [with an Asian population] we have to have three proms.” He chuckled slightly, and our conversation closed. Maybe he caught my drift. Maybe I ignited a small change in his comprehension of culture, race, ethnicity, and most importantly, the lived experiences of his students (Ayers, 2004).

Facing this man’s willingness to admit that segregation is acceptable instantly reminded me of how despicable some people believe my and others’ multi-race existence is. What do *they* have in common? Why would *they* socialize together? His ideas confirmed Lillian Smith’s (1949/1994) observation: “There it lies, broken in two by one strange idea. Minds broken. Hearts broken. Conscience torn from acts. A culture split into a thousand pieces. That is segregation” (p. 39). Racial segregation is something I despise. But it is part of living in the U.S. South. It is difficult to express my perceptions of any colleague, who claims to educate children, while believing segregation is adequate and even more appropriate for children than integration. If segregation is acceptable, where should I teach? At which schools should the multi-race children learn? As Smith would say, “There are worse things than mobs: segregation is worse, and the continuous drip of shame and indignity that goes along with it is worse, and the refusal to come clean and confess our wrong-doing, and the reluctance to commit ourselves to the future” (p. 242). In a discussion of the U.S. South, Pinar (2004) realizes that the same type of indignity that Smith recognized is a hindrance to progress. “This phenomenon of denial and flight from reality involves, unsurprisingly, distortions in several spheres, distortions that undermine the South’s efforts to develop culturally, even economically” (Pinar, 2004, p. 95). Here I am, my multi-race self, living in the segregated South. I am trying to educate and re-educate myself and others about the social dynamics and contexts with which they are so familiar. These contexts are often unrecognizable, and often, difficult to comprehend as damaging to all of those living within them.

### **Transcending Theoretical and Methodological Boundaries**

Validating to colleagues, students, and peers that I am multi-racially and multi-culturally

*enough* is an ongoing, ever-fluctuating, and ever-present challenge. It was a complicated confrontation at a Georgia social studies curriculum workshop, when a racially integrated prom was perceived as unreasonable. Being *enough* is an obstacle to my present relationships with my students who want me to view societies through a White cultural lens because I phenotypically “look like” them. One of the challenges of my inquiry was to transgress *monocultures of the mind* (Shiva, 1993), to hear, to make meaning of, and to honor the differences, contradictions, and complexities of lives in-between. The intricacies of undefined and in-between spaces problematize notions of race, gender, class, and power as I explore the in-betweenness of my life as a multiracial person (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; He, 2003, 2010). Drawing upon the works of multi-racial theorists (e. g. Root, 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 2001a, 2001b; Salgado, 2004; Spencer, 1999, 2006), I explore curriculum as a racial text (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995/2002) by tracing ideas from multicultural education (e. g. Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006) and critical race theory [e. g. Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999, 2001, 2003).

I also draw upon a wide array of methodological approaches in my inquiry such as the works of theorists writing about the lived experience through autobiography (e. g. Morris, 2008; Pinar, 2007), narrative (e. g. Carger, 1996, 2009; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), and memoir (e. g. Ayers, 2004; Chai, 2007; He, 2003; Hoffman, 1989). The power of this line of inquiry lies in its narrative possibilities to capture the contradictions and paradoxes of lives in-between race and place, “to honor the subtleties, fluidities, and complexities of such experience, and to cultivate understanding towards individual ... experience and the multicultural/multiracial contexts that shape and are shaped by such experience” (He, 2003, p. xvii). This line of inquiry creates new ways to think about and write about in-between experience and their relevance to multicultural and multiracial education. This line of inquiry challenges educators, teachers, administrators, and policy makers to view the educational experience of students with multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual backgrounds by shattering predetermined categories and stereotyped classifications and looking into unknown and fluid realms of the in-betweenness of their lives. This challenge helps create equitable and just opportunities and to engender culturally responsive and inspiring curricular and learning environment to bring out the best potential in all in diverse schools, communities, neighborhoods, tribes, and societies.

I fictionalize the characters, locations and details in my stories to protect the individuals and communities from misconceptions and false assumptions. For instance, the story I share at the beginning of this article about a social studies colleague who believes racially integrated proms to be unreasonable, shed light on some real issues associated with responses, constructions, and communications about race and racism in public schools. The stories are based on actual events, though some of the educators in the stories ignore their existence and negative influence on children. The stories can be characterized as politically incorrect, unprofessional, or even worthy of contract dismissal. In some cases, I feel that some educators in my stories need their teaching certifications investigated for legitimacy. To avoid causing undue harm to those people that are unknowingly included in this inquiry in a tainted, unbecoming light, I use fictionalized characters and places to tell counter stories. Those counter stories with changing histories and shifting contexts complicate the life that I live in-between contested race, gender, class, place, and power in the South.

As I strive to find modes of expression and representation to tell the counter stories, I realize that chronologically telling my life stories in-between contested race, gender, class and power in the U.S. South is impossible. The stories do not flow out of my memories, my journals, or my recollections chronologically. Rather they are connected by themes.

## Researching Counter Narratives of Lives In-Between Contested Race, Gender, Class, and Power

To make meaning of the counter narratives in my inquiry, I begin to study multi-race theories while tracing its connections with multicultural education and critical race theory. I research multi-race literature in the fields of political science and psychology. Some psychology researchers describe the identity development of individuals that do not only claim association with one racial group, but also with two or more racial groups. These multi-race psychological studies are more prevalent in the psychology field than other academic fields. However a vast gap remains between the number of mono-racial and multiracial studies in psychology with the latter lagging behind (Suyemoto, 2004). Gaining momentum alongside the theorists studying multiracial identity development is a political movement for multiracialism (Tessman, 1999). This movement is not an academic field because its objectives are limited to making political and social gains on behalf of multiracial people. Oftentimes, the psychologists and political movement leaders align or overlap in their explanations and conclusions about this multi-race group (Tessman, 1999). At other junctures, these two groups' ideas about the predicament of multi-race peoples conflict.

Salgado (2004) recognizes the challenges and argues that multi-race theory is a form of “deliberative discourse” that lies beyond modern and postmodern identity theories, potentially within a “transmodern” theory (p. 34). Salgado also introduces the term “misceg-narrations” along with counter-narratives, memoirs, and anthologies of the multi-race experience as forms of discourse that are deliberative and centered in a space “that moves” (p. 47). For example, James McBride (1996) in his memoir, *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*, details his experience before multi-race theory became political in the 1960s. Langston Hughes, whose mother was a slave and father was a slave owner, shared his experience through poems. Similar to my inquiry, the “misceg-narration” (Salgado, 2004) is a type of counter-narrative that challenges engrained notions of race, ethnicity, and culture.

Biographical works centered on the multi-race experience are the most prominent form of multi-race theory (Olumide, 2002). Each narrative of this conflicting, intertwining, in-between experience is unique. There are multiple edited anthologies that include “misceg-narrations” as well as entire books devoted to individual stories (Olumide; Salgado, 2004). As Kwan and Speirs (2004) state in the introduction to *Mixing It Up*, “It is only through the individual lived experiences of mixed-race people that we can understand the plural nature of multiracialities” (p. 4). This approach to writing about multi-race theory allows for the idiosyncrasies of distinct experiences that cannot be repeated between siblings of the same parentage (Root, 1996b; Xie & Goyette, 1997).

Multi-race theorists analyze the experience of individuals whose experience is lived in-between two or more races, which are lived within the boundaries of our society's governmental policies, both written and unwritten. On June 12, 1967, in the Supreme Court Case *Loving v. State of Virginia*, the remaining laws against interracial marriage were overturned (Root, 1996a). At the time, fourteen states still outlawed these marriages. The federal government overturned the laws, but the state where I attended high school, Alabama, did not remove their anti-miscegenation law until 2000. My counter-narratives, as revealed in the following excerpt, confirm that such policies carve, shape, mold, and scratch the lives of multi-race individuals and families that struggle to know that they are *enough*:

During the spring of 2000, my dad called me with some news. He explained that the state of Alabama removed the law from the state Constitution that outlawed miscegenation. My parents' marriage was finally legally recognized by the state of where they lived. My dad exclaimed, "My kids are no longer illegitimate!" It was an oddly disturbing, yet joyful expression that released a measure of relief onto my entire family's identity since we moved to the South. Finally, my parents' marriage was legal *enough*. The following day, in a multicultural education course at UW-Madison, I told my class about this thrilling event. My classmates just stared at me. The teacher's assistant just stared at me. I was speaking of a foreign topic and astonishing the class full of White pre-service teachers with my non-Whiteness. Though entirely related to the class discussion at hand, it was too extreme, too real, or maybe too unreal to engage this group of students. I was the other. I was elated to earn overdue justice, but my peers misunderstood my feelings of joy. Despite their confusion, my feelings and my experiences are legitimate, just as my siblings and I are legitimate children of my parents. (Carlyle, 2010)

Alongside the psychological and political literature on multi-race, I researched those writing about, with, as, and from the perspective of multiracial people. Gloria Anzaldua is the first multi-race theorist to whom I was introduced and her ability to express her ideas through words about in-betweenness helped me to understand myself both as a woman and a person of *some* color. Anzaldua (1981) explains her motivation to write, "Why should I try to justify why I write? Do I need to justify being Chicana, being woman? You might as well ask me to try to justify why I'm alive" (p. 187). I, too, find myself justifying my existence, perspective, and reasons because I do not follow the traditional forms of educational research. I battle within myself and with those outside myself regarding whether my multi-racial existence is *enough*, and therefore, whether my multi-race research is credible *enough*. Including a multi-race theorist like Anzaldua, who includes voices from a range of diverse genders, races, and sexual preferences, in a field like curriculum studies could be a significant move forward.

Maria P. P. Root is a multi-race theorist whose multicultural perspectives are undeniable. She was born in the Philippines with mixed Filipino, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, German, and Irish heritages. Her works discuss multiracial identity development (e. g. Root, 1992, 1996a). Root (2003) believes that "Many mixed race people provide us an optimism that eventually race may be a relic" (p. 18). In the initial stages of my inquiry, I concurred with Root that theories outside the boundaries could eventually defeat the boundaries. As wonderful as her writings made me feel about my positioning and understandings at the time, my inquiry into the multi-race experience continued to challenge my perspectives.

I encountered a challenge to my beliefs about multi-race studies when I began to read Rainier Spencer's (1999) ideas. He is boldly critical of multi-race theory, which pushed me to think critically about my own understandings of multiracialism. In his book, *Spurious Issues: Race and Multiracial Identity Politics in the United States*, Spencer (1999) starts: "'You're not worried about me marrying your daughter,' James Baldwin told a White southerner during a television debate. 'You're worried about me marrying your wife's daughter. I've been marrying your daughter even since the days of slavery'" (p. 1). This quote re-ignites the reality of White superiority directly into one of society's most personal, yet significantly political, spaces: marriage. Spencer does not hesitate to be confrontational about how historically oppressive and unreliable notions of multiracialism are, if we are ever to become a society without racism. He discusses how multiracial and antiracial ideologies could disrupt the U.S. racial ordering of

society by asking “how can mixed-race or multiracial persons place themselves with consistency and meaning within that system?” (p. 5). The pain and frustration associated with multi-racialism remains as long as the myth of race remains. Spencer believes it is well past time to begin problematizing race categories altogether. He believes we must move away from classifications of people and promotes the ideology that we are all members of the human race.

I started to question how I had been racialized when I began to delve deeper into the ideas of such theorists as Anzaldua, Root, and Spencer. By the time I read Spencer’s (1999, 2006) works, I wanted to quit. I believed, once again, that I was not qualified to research and write about the multi-racial experience. No matter how compelled to these ideas and experiences I was, I still felt that I was not mixed *enough*. I needed to either be “more” Asian, or “mixed with” Black, or bilingual. I certainly did not want a multi-race theorist to criticize my work for not being scholarly, let alone lacking a “true” understanding of the multiracial experience. I encountered this emotional, social and mental roadblock. I began to divert the focus of my studies into other realms including women’s studies, pedagogy, and educational administration. Despite my attempts at diverging from multi-race ideas, more and more stories transpired in my memory and experience. Denying my multi-race existence became impossible. I could not silence a part of myself to satisfy a group of obscure critics. My experience had to be *enough*, and I returned to studies around multi-race with more devotion to deepening my knowledge and understanding.

As I returned to multi-race studies, I was branded with criticism of the multi-race field and curriculum studies field. With a renewed perspective, I argue that it was not me that was not mixed *enough*, but it was the academic fields that misrepresented and limited the spaces in-between race. Multi-race theorists, like Anzaldua, Root and Spencer, have influenced my own lived experience as a multiracial student and educator. They helped to guide my curriculum research, despite their exclusion from the field, because they voiced race as a multi-race phenomenon for my multi-race inquiry.

Curriculum studies, a field of *currere*, “the running of the course,” include the counter-narratives of multiracial people negotiating spaces in-between as part of the curriculum as a racial text (Pinar, 2004, p. 35). Nevertheless, there are ideas, concepts, subtleties, and novelties associated with mixed-race experiences that have not been theorized. There are inner negotiations and misunderstood interactions that transpire as mixed-race people live simultaneously in multiple socially constructed categories that societies recognize as necessary, if not factual. Multi-race people such as myself challenge the notion of these categories (Herring, 1995). By omission, mixed-race people are negated to nonexistent impossibilities in many current studies of race. Research into these omitted experiences is a worthwhile possibility. The absence of curriculum theory about mixed race inspires me to incessantly legitimize the importance of recognizing the mixed-race experience as a vital part of humanity.

I am personally disinterested in locating my multiracial identity development into one of a set of categories like many psychologists studying multi-race propose (Herring, 1995). These categories limit and simplify, rather than extend and complicate, my multi-racial experience. I did not know which multiracial political movement I belonged to at the time (Winters, 2003); I simply knew movement was needed. Stagnant cultural understandings and interactions across social classifications, such as race, suppress the truths of lived experiences that can never decrease. The stories that are silenced remain within those who have lived them. No matter how silenced the stories may sound, they are not destroyed. Un-silencing stories moves the

experiences into a public space through which collective and socially just movement can take place.

### Raising Challenging Questions

Until I was twelve years old, I identified myself as many things. But I described myself ethnically: one half-Polish, one-quarter Russian, and one-quarter Japanese. Before I turned thirteen, social and political impositions required me to identify as a multi-race person. As my counter-narratives illustrate, these shifts in my ethnic and racial identification began when my family moved from suburban-Chicago to a small town in the South. Southern relocation meant that an ethnic description of my culture was no longer good *enough*. My ethnicity no longer mattered to the public. What was of the most significance was that I was not 100% White. Many days, I wonder what it would be like not to live in-between two races. *Would it be easier to endure my social, political, professional and personal relationships if I was one race?* As I navigate these relationships, I encounter educative situations that are difficult to ignore. I would like to give the responsibility of educating my students and colleagues about the multi-race experience to someone else. I often deduce that there must be someone who is more capable, prepared, tolerant, and patient than I am. I feel constantly that I am not *enough*. Why should I have to tolerate others' ignorance, especially when ignorance rarely tolerates me?

When the voices that challenge ignorance and problematize the status quo are excluded from the conversation, educators perpetuate a horrifying cycle of unquestioned acceptance of marginalization. My voice, a multi-race voice from in-between, deserves inclusion. Just as I wanted to ask a social studies colleague who questioned the importance of a racially integrated prom, "What kind of educators are we if we do not value all of the races and spaces of our students and each other?"

Race and its importance to the deconstruction and understanding of curriculum is not marginal, but rather an unavoidable issue for educators to address. The marginalization of individuals on the basis of race must be understood to understand the lived experience of all of those who are racialized, even those who would like to qualify as not being racial *enough*. Knowing that race is not a biological truth, but an idea used metaphorically to categorize and demoralize people is crucial to theorize the social construction of race (Gates, 1985). The idea of race continues to categorize and demoralize me because I straddle two different races. Race is not an "irreducible category, but instead ... formed by and informing a whole range of social, historical, political, and cultural circumstances within which the subject [myself] locates herself" (Goldman, 1998, p. 292). The complexity of race is evident. How much more complex is multi-race? According to Spencer (1999), I could not avoid the marginalization because people of mixed-race heritage are discriminated against not because they are mixed, but because they are not all-White. Race is a misnomer. It is socially constructed. Despite, it ranks people of one or more of these mythical constructions within a structure that elevates the pure White construction of race to supreme. My stories of being a "not-all-White" or "not *enough*" person are counter-narratives to the meta narratives that situate Whites above people of *some* color both socially and politically.

Race and racism are continuously reinvented and represented. There is a need among education professionals to continually engage with what it means to imagine, create, and implement an anti-racist curriculum that moves towards social justice. There is the pervasive

“demographic imperative” which is the mono-culture of the teaching profession (Sleeter, 2005). In this mono-culture, teachers falsely assume that because they took a multicultural education course in college or have a friend who is of color that they are capable of crossing from one cultural space into *others*. Their culturally homogenous colleagues perpetuate these shallow beliefs and ignore what is happening in the spaces in-between. When there is not single one faculty member who recognizes the oppressive patriarchy, there are faculty members who float along in ignorant harmony. This is egregiously evident because “achievement gap” remains unchanged, despite No Child Left Behind’s (2001) proof that educators continue to leave *other people’s children* (Delpit, 1995) behind. More than a decade has passed since the original passage of *No Child Left Behind*. I am concerned that only the language about race, gender, class, and power has been shifted while marginalizations and suppressions remain.

Within the present educational discourse, knowing about multiculturalism and the existence of racist power structure are aptitudes for educators to demonstrate. As an underhanded element of that discourse, too many White educators implicitly persist that they are indeed the norm. The vocabulary of those White, who claim to be multiculturally aware and/or not to be a racist, has been altered to include a multicultural slang to satisfy *others*. Yet the racist power structure remains undisturbed. Some White people seek to be comfortably *the same* as *everyone* else through their word choices about contested issues of race, ethnicity, culture and power. They underhandedly state, “We are *all different*.” This implies that, “We are *all the same* because we are *all different*.” What about a discourse that attempts to qualify racially different individuals, as all different, liberates the racist power structure? These words are lip service that recognizes the *other* without liberating the *other*. The statement “we are all *different*” only re-masks the privilege Whites are granted.

Whites do not relinquish their involvement in the perpetuation of White privilege by only implicating themselves as one of many differences. How could White educators begin to more appropriately address the “demographic imperative” (Sleeter, 2005)? How could White educators potentially disrupt the racist power structure to which they are beneficiaries? White educators could begin to implicate themselves as members of the dominant group in a racist power structure. They could recognize that the privileges that this structure offers are not be undone qualifying Whites and others as *all equally different*. This multi-culturally acceptable vocabulary attempts to normalize what are distinct and oppressive differences. It includes Whites in difference, while allowing Whites to be indifferent to racism. It marginalizes the unresolved differences between those with White privileges and those without. Any attempt at normalizing the differences between the oppressed and the oppressor is a shortsighted measure that maintains the status quo. A multicultural education anthem that espouses, “You are different from me. I am different from you. We are all different. I’m different, so I am just like you,” hinders the possibilities for social change engendered by my multi-race inquiry. More counter-narratives need to be told to awaken more educators to recognize the oppression and to challenge the discrepancies. I am reminded of this need for more educators to recognize oppression every time when a White educator tells me about a student that is not White. My colleagues whisper that the student “is Black” using an inaudible, airy tone. Why do they need to whisper a student’s or anyone’s race? Why would anyone shy away from using his or her race as a physical description? Are White people scared to let anyone know that they are White? If not, why would anyone be afraid to be identified as Black or any other racial minority? I am compelled to ask these questions. I resort to less confrontational attempts at revealing the racist notions that lie right beneath their whispers. It is within these types of in-between spaces that my multi-race

stories disrupt previous and existing notions of race and multi-race. It is within these spaces that I realize that I am indeed multi-racial and multi-cultural *enough*.

### **Invigorating Possibilities for Positive Curriculum and Social Change**

My stories of a plight to answer, “Am I *enough*?” create a counter-narrative that is incongruent to the mainstream approaches to multicultural education. The stories criticize the idea that multicultural education can be defined with a series of rigid categories. If multiculturalism means we tolerate, or even embrace *others*, *othering* becomes an acceptable route to understanding individuals around us. I use counter-narratives to uncover that *othering* through racial divide sabotages possibilities for the *other*. I try to make “meaning of experience in relationship, rather than making meaning in isolation” (He & Phillion, 2008, p. 15). The counter-narratives uncover how inconceivable it becomes to narrowly categorize the *other* without inherently marginalizing *others*.

Counter-narratives create new ways to think about and write about in-between experience and their relevance to realizing an anti-racist education. Historically, autobiographical accounts by women of color have been used to authenticate the racial and gender self in a way that was unrecognized by the White patriarchy (Harris, 2005; McKay, 1998). Multi-race narratives written from a critical race perspective help “tell hidden and silenced narratives of suppressed and underrepresented groups to counter the preconceived metanarrative represented in ‘scientific based research’ that has portrayed these groups as deficient and inferior” (He & Phillion, 2008, p. 16). The previously unrecognized, indeterminate, invisible, negated, silenced narratives of mine, that are not Black or White, red or yellow, but ambiguous and *enough*, challenge race as a social construction and race as an oppressive classification (Carger, 2005; Lionnet, 1998).

As a pre-service teacher educator and a multi-racial woman living in-between race, I often envision colleagues and students asking: “why contemplate something that has nothing to do with *me*?” I do not think that educators have the luxury of ignoring positions in-between. “Teachers wield enormous power in the classroom—legitimizing situations by their action and inaction” (Choe, 1999, p. 224). It is my intention that my inquiry into the multiracial experience challenge educators, teachers, administrators, and policy makers to view the educational experience of students with multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual backgrounds by shattering predetermined categories and stereotyped classifications and looking into unknown and fluid realms of the in-betweenness of their lives. This challenge helps create equitable and just opportunities and engender culturally responsive and inspiring curricular and learning environments to bring out the best potential in all in diverse schools, communities, neighborhoods, tribes and societies.

### **References**

- Anzaldúa, G.E. (1981). Speaking in tongues: A letter to third world women writers. In C. L. Moraga & G.E. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. Berkeley, CA: Third Women Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. & Keating, A. (Eds.). (2002). *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation*. New York: Routledge.

- Ayers, W. (2004). *Teaching toward freedom: Moral commitment and ethical action in the classroom*. Boston: Beacon.
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Broyard, B. (2007). *One drop: My father's hidden life—a story of race and family secrets*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Carger, C.L. (1996). *Of borders and dreams: A Mexican-American experience of urban education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Carger, C.L. (2005). The art of narrative inquiry: Embracing emotion and seeing transformation. In J. Phillion, M.F. He, & F.M. Connelly (Eds.), *Narrative and experience in multicultural education* (pp.231-245). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Carger, C.L. (2009). *Dreams deferred: Dropping out and struggling forward*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Carlyle, S.E.J. (2010, April). *Are you mixed? A war bride's granddaughter's narrative of lives in-between contested race, gender, class and power*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgia Southern University, U. S. A.
- Chai, M. (2007). *Hapa girl: A memoir*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Choe, L.D. (1999). Negotiating border of consciousness in the pursuit of education: Identity politics and gender of second-generation Korean American women. In L. Parker, D. Dehyle & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Race is . . . race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education* (pp. 205-230). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Connelly, F.M. & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(4), 2-14.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Falk, W.W. (2004). *Rooted in place: Family and belonging in a Southern Black community*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Gates, Jr., H. (1985). Introduction to “race,” writing and difference. *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), 1-20.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goldman, A.E. (1998). Autobiography, ethnography, and history: A model for reading, 1995. In S. Smith & J. Watson (Eds.) *Women, autobiography, theory: A reader* (pp. 288-298). Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Harris, M.Y. (2005). Black women writing autobiography: Autobiography in multicultural education. In J. Phillion, M.F. He, & F.M. Connelly (Eds.), *Narrative and experience in multicultural education* (pp.36-52). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- He, M. F. (2003). *A river forever flowing: Cross-cultural lives and identities in the multicultural landscape*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- He, M. F. (2010). Exile pedagogy: Teaching and living in-between. In, J. A. Sandlin, B. D. Schultz, & J. Burdick (Eds.), *Handbook of public pedagogy: Education and learning beyond schooling* (pp.469-482). New York: Routledge.
- He, M. F. & Phillion, J. (2008). Personal~passionate~participatory inquiry: Research for social justice. In M.F. He & J. Phillion (Eds.), *Personal~passionate~participatory inquiry into social justice in education* (pp. 1-21). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

- Hermes, M. (2005). White teachers, native students: Rethinking culture-based education. In J. Phillion, M.F. He, & F.M. Connelly (Eds.), *Narrative and experience in multicultural education* (pp. 95-115). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Herring, R.D. (1995). Developing biracial ethnic identity: A review of the increasing dilemma. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 95*(23), 29-38.
- Hoffman, E. (1989). *Lost in translation: A life in a new language*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Howard, G.R. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kwan, S. & Spiers, K. (2004). Introduction. In S. Kwan & K. Speirs (Eds.), *Multiracial subjects: Mixing it up* (pp. 1-10). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? In L. Parker, D. Dehyle & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Race is . . . race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education* (pp. 7-30). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (Ed.) (2003). *Critical race theory: Perspectives on the social studies--The Profession, policies, and curriculum*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Lionnett, F. (1998). The politics and aesthetics of metissage, 1989. In S. Smith & J. Watson (Eds.) *Women, autobiography, theory: A reader* (pp. 325-336). Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Loutzenheiser, L.W. (2003). Uneasy similarities, uneven parallels: Race, sexuality, and Civil Rights discourse. In G. Ladson-Billings (Ed.), *Critical race theory perspectives on social studies: The profession, policies, and curriculum* (pp. 149-170). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- McBride, J. (1996). *The color of water: A Black man's tribute to his White mother*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- McKay, N.Y. (1998). The narrative self: Race, politics, and culture in Black American women's autobiography, 1995. In S. Smith & J. Watson (Eds.) *Women, autobiography, theory: A reader* (pp. 96-107). Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Morris, M. (2008). *Teaching through the ill body: A spiritual and aesthetic approach to pedagogy and illness*. New York: Sense.
- Morrison, T. (1990). The site of memory. In R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. Minh-Ha, & C. West (Eds.). *Out there: Marginalization and contemporary cultures*. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Murphy-Shigematsu, S. (2001). Multiethnic lives and monoethnic myths: American-Japanese Amerasians in Japan. In T. Williams-Leon & C.L. Nakashima (Eds.), *The sum of our parts: Mixed heritage Asian Americans* (pp. 207-216). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Olumide, J. (2002). *Raiding the gene pool: The social construction of mixed race*. London: Pluto Press.
- Pinar, W.F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Pinar, W.F. (2007). *Intellectual advancement through disciplinarity: Verticality and horizontality in curriculum studies*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.

- Pinar, W.F., Reynolds, W.M., Slattery, P., & Taubman, P.M. (2002). *Understanding curriculum: An introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Root, M.P.P. (Ed.). (1992). *Racially mixed people in America*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Root, M.P.P. (1996a). The multiracial experience: Racial borders as a significant frontier in race relations. In M.P.P. Root (Ed.), *The multiracial experience: Racial borders as the new frontier* (xiii-xxviii). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Root, M.P.P. (1996b). A bill of rights for racially mixed people. In M.P.P. Root (Ed.), *The multiracial experience: Racial borders as the new frontier* (pp. 3-14). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Root, M.P.P. (2001a). Factors influencing the variation in racial and ethnic identity of mixed-heritage persons of Asian ancestry. In T. Williams-Leon & C.L. Nakashima (Eds.), *The sum of our parts: Mixed heritage Asian American*. (pp. 61-70). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Root, M.P.P. (2001b). *Love's revolution: Interracial marriage*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Root, M.P.P. (2003). Five mixed-race identities: From relic to revolution. In L.I. Winters & H.I. DeBose (Eds.), *New faces in a changing America: Multiracial identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (pp. 3-20). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Salgado, R.S. (2004). Miscegenations. In S. Kwan & K. Speirs (Eds.), *Multiracial subjects: Mixing it up* (pp. 31-70). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Seller, M. & Weis, L. (Eds.) (1997). *Beyond Black and White: New faces and voices in U.S. schools*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Shiva, V. (1993) *Monocultures of the mind: Perspectives on biodiversity and biotechnology*. London: UK: Zed Books.
- Sleeter, C.E. (2005). How White teachers construct race. In C. McCarthy, W. Crichlow, G. Dimitriadis & N. Dolby (Eds.), *Race, identity and representation in education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 243-256). New York: Routledge.
- Smith, L. (1949/1994). *Killers of the dream*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Spencer, R. (1999). *Spurious issues: Race and multiracial identity politics in the United States*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Spencer, R. (2006). *Challenging multiracial identity*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Suyemoto, K.L. (2004). Racial/ethnic identities and related attributed experiences of multiracial Japanese European Americans. *Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 32, 206-221.
- Tessman, L. (1999). The racial politics of mixed race. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 30(2), 276-294.
- Winters, L.I. (2003). The multiracial movement: Harmony and discord. In L.I. Winters & H.I. DeBose (Eds.), *New faces in a changing America: Multiracial identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (pp. 373-379). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Xie, Y. & Goyette, K. (1997). The racial identification of biracial children with one Asian parent: Evidence from the 1990 census. *Social Forces*, 76(2), 547-570.

