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Kate De Soto  
Multidisciplinary  
Considerations for Clinical  
Work with the Multiracial  
Identity

## ABSTRACT

This project was conducted with the intentions of broadening the discussion that is occurring in clinical fields regarding the multiracial identity. Much of the discussion that occurs is treated as though racial dynamics are fixed (Leary, 2000). This theoretical paper aims to exemplify the nuance of the multiracial identity by combining clinical theory with a more culturally grounded analysis of racial discourse. Intersubjectivity theory is used in this paper to exemplify the value of using a clinical theory when conceptualizing racial issues, while cultural studies provides a deeper understanding of the system of race in the United States. The use of the intersubjectivity theory and the writings of cultural studies as applied to the phenomenon of the multiracial identity is exemplified through the use of a case study. This paper concludes with a proposal for a set of principles and considerations for practice with multiracial individuals that is rooted in a historically and politically aware, socially based approach to working intersubjectively with multiracial individuals.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR CLINICAL WORK WITH THE  
MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2010

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The system of racism in the United States is a pervasive social construction that is alive and functioning in every aspect of American society and culture. Over the years, the way race is understood has broadened, as it became less defined as a biological marker and more as a social construction (Shih & Sanchez, 2009, p.3). This change in definition, along with people's fight for equality especially during the civil rights movement, has affected the way race functions as a macro level concept and in the daily lives of individuals.

The concept of race has been used and constructed by societies to identify and group its members. This concept has a long history, and over time, it has come to mean different things in different cultures around the world. In America, the concept of race has played a major role in the dispersing of power. These power dynamics have been communicated overtime in a range of ways that continue because they have become ingrained in American culture. They have become a part of the culture in which we develop and live.

Each individual's identity develops over time through interactions that occur between the individual and his/her society. These interactions, which are both implicit and explicit, occur at micro, mezzo and macro levels. Throughout an individual's developmental process, he/she internalizes these messages and begins to develop ideas of who he/she is to society. According to Davies (2004), children begin to model behaviors

and relational styles of their caretakers during the preschool years. This modeling demonstrates the child's understanding of his/her place in a relationship (Haight, 1999 in Davies, 2004). This "place" can be seen as a cohesive representation of the values they have been taught regarding how to treat others. Naturally, if a child begins their socialization process by modeling their caretaker's behavior, they will also begin to take on any behavior difference that may occur in relationships due to social structuring.

These meanings, which are learned and modified throughout our lives, are in messages which are presented to us on a daily basis through our interactions with our society's culture. They are in the conversation a parent has with his/her child, the music we listen to, the commercials we watch, the social structure we live in, etc. These meanings often become an unspoken part of our lives. They influence the way that we mentally structure our world, and the way we view ourselves as functioning within it. These meanings/messages are the norms of society, the standard by which people become "othered".

Clinicians work with a range of individuals, couples, families and groups. All of these potential clients have developed in relationships, which are a part of society and culture. The importance of a person's identity, their narrative, their sense of self, in the clinical setting is indisputable. Yet, it is only since the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's that the "dual perspective" (Norton, 1978), which acknowledged the differing world perspectives between people who are white and people of color, broke way for the issue of diversity to become a part of the field of social work (Eun-Kyoung & McRoy, 2008). Since the early 1970's the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) made it a mandate for graduate schools to "increase the diversity in their curriculum, faculty and

student body” (Daniel, 2007). Despite the efforts to emphasize the importance of the issues of diversity, the research regarding issues of race and multiculturalism is still limited. In a content review of six prominent counseling journals, Edwards & Pedrotti (2008) found only 18 published articles that focused on *multiracial* issues up to the year 2006. This paper aims to contribute to this base of literature by exploring how issues of race are addressed in the context of therapy.

Specifically, the phenomenon of the racial identity in clinical work will be explored through a theoretical approach that will use two theories to analyze this phenomenon. The first theory is that of Intersubjectivity. The second source which will be applied to the phenomenon is the writings on race from the field of Cultural Studies. While Cultural Studies itself is a field and not a theory, it provides perspectives and approaches which could be seen as a theory if this field supported the practice of creating theories.

Intersubjectivity is a theory that continues to grow. The key to this theory is the concept of the subjectivity of the individual (Natterson & Friedman, 2005). This theory provides psychoanalysis with a theory that has a different perspective on where psychoanalytic inquiry should occur. According to Stolorow & Atwood (2002), psychoanalytic inquiry should occur in the “larger system created by the mutual interplay between the subjective worlds of patient and analyst, or of child and caregiver.” This theory was chosen due to its emphasis on the third space in a therapeutic relationship. This writer feels that this theory will allow for a deeper exploration of the issue of race in the clinical setting while allowing the room for this writer to explore the many dynamics that occur in the therapeutic relationship.

Cultural Studies is a field of study that developed in Birmingham, England. It is a theory that invokes the critical analysis of the contextuality of an issue (Grossberg, 2006). Over the years, this field has developed a range of writings on the issue of race, which have looked at the concept of race from a very critical, sometimes radical perspective. The use of this literature will allow this writer to explore the macro level dynamics in which race functions and the various effects racialization may have on individuals.

The next chapter will outline the structure of this paper along with the method this writer will use to explore the phenomenon of the multiracial identity in the clinical setting.



CHAPTER II  
CONCEPTUALIZATION AND METHODOLOGY

*Conceptualization*

Over the last 40 years the clinical field has made significant efforts to address issues of diversity and cultural sensitivity. This paper hopes to further the discussion around these issues by looking specifically at the multiracial identity, an identity that is often overlooked in a country that has historically emphasized the black/white dichotomy. By exploring this identity as it is rooted in this country's larger racial discourse, it is hoped that readers will become more conscious of how the balancing act of being defined as multiracial may affect an individual. Through the application of intersubjectivity theory and cultural studies this writer hopes to bring to light the nuances of having a multiracial identity.

Intersubjectivity theory was chosen for this paper because this writer felt that it was necessary to include a psychoanalytic theory in order to integrate the clinical aspect of the phenomenon. Psychoanalytic theory is the base upon which much of clinical discourse is built. Intersubjectivity theory is a newer theory that has developed out of a critical analysis of psychoanalytic literature. It aims to battle psychoanalysis' tendency to operate from a male dominated western perspective that is rooted in a history of structuralism. The concepts that will be used from this theory are these theorists' conceptualization of the unconscious; subjectivity; the intersubjective field; perspectival

realism and the role of attunement/malattunement in development as well as in the therapeutic relationship.

The second theoretical approach that will be used is cultural studies. The writings on race and identity that have been produced by this field were chosen due to their ability to analyze racial identity as a racial conjuncture that belongs to the larger racial discourse. This theory incorporates a macro level understanding of the creation and articulation of knowledge while drawing one's attention to the effects of this process. The concepts that will be used from this theory are the concepts inclusion/exclusion; the threat of hybridity; process of racialization as an articulation of racial discourse; and the effects of spatiality on agency.

### *Methodology*

The following chapter will present the phenomenon of the multiracial identity in the clinical setting. Here we will explore the history of race as well as the history of psychoanalysis as related to its perspectives on race and racism. Then in the following chapters, this writer will present intersubjectivity theory (chapter 4) and cultural studies (chapter five).

In chapter 6, the discussion chapter, this writer will attempt to create a combined discussion of both theories as applied to the phenomenon. This discussion will be grounded through the use of a case study that is based on my own experiences with the phenomenon. I am using myself as the focus of the case study because of the potency of my own subjectivity relative to this issue. I do not feel that I could do justice to anyone else's subjective experience, nor could I create a narrative that would be as complex and nuanced as my own. I acknowledge that this does not fit the goal of objective research,

but I also feel that to have this discussion without revealing my own narrative would be hypocritical. One of the main goals of this paper is to encourage clinicians to be aware of their own racial identities and how it may influence their work. By discussing the identified concepts of the chosen theories in relation to a case study this writer hopes to explore both the clinical conceptualization of individual racial identity development, as well as the potential clinical dynamics. Through this discussion this writer aims to reveal the unavoidable complexity that is present when working clinically with a multiracial individual in a way that takes into account both micro and macro influences of development in a non-reductionist way.

#### *Strengths and Limitations*

The first issue that I would like to address is my own identity as a multiracial individual raised in Hawaii. This identity can be seen as both a strength and limitation to this study. Being raised in Hawaii exposed me to a cross-cultural environment in which being a person of color was the dominant experience. My own identity development did not focus around my race; it focused more around me being “local”. In my community, people are often referred to as being “local”, the dominant group created in opposition to white. As with racial identities, the definition of “local” is not easy to describe, but in general it meant that I practiced the local culture, an aspect that more often than not felt more relevant than my racial or ethnic heritage. The local culture of Hawaii is unique in that it encompasses many cultural characteristics of a range of people from around the Pacific and various parts of Asia. This unique developmental experience has caused conflict for me in regards to my process of racial identity development on the mainland. I do feel that I have been forced to live within the mainland’s racial discourse. This is

where my identity becomes a strength and a limitation for this paper. It is a strength in that I offer a different perspective and am very open to the “fluid-ness” of identity. On the other hand it is a limitation in that I am biased against the current way of framing identity on the mainland since many of my experiences with it have been negative and have felt very oppressive and un-accepting.

Although objectivity is typically a valued goal in research, I must admit that this paper does take a stance against the idea that objectivity exists and should be aspired to. In this paper I have instead aimed to be as aware of my own subjective experience as possible while trying to present others positions in the most undiluted way.

Another limitation of this paper is the language used. In this paper I attempt to open a progressive exploration of the phenomenon, but am limited by language. For example, although this paper does explore the oppressive effects of being racialized, I myself have chosen to focus this paper on the multiracial individual. Although by using this word (multiracial) I am participating in the perpetuation of racial discourse, I do not feel that there is any other mainstream word that would be as accessible to the reader.

Finally, the tendency of this writer to be vague and slightly abstract is also a limitation and a strength. This is a limitation in that the writing is very broad, but it is a strength in that it exemplifies the subjectivity of the phenomenon and this writer’s own personal goal of not falling victim to determinist and reductionist thinking. To pretend that this paper is objective and that the phenomenon or the theories can be presented in a clear, concise way, while fitting within the limits of the timeframe would inevitably have led to reductionism. With these limits and strengths in mind, we will now move forward into our exploration of the phenomenon.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PHENOMENON

“Multiracial individuals in clinical work”--this phrase, built of multilayered concepts, is grounded in perspectives that are constantly evolving through society and culture. To begin understanding the complexity of this phenomenon, the multiracial identity in the clinical setting, we must first attempt to become conscious of the layers of meanings and perspectives that make it up. We will first attempt to understand the many facets that the word ‘multiracial’ has functioned in throughout history, and how it is positioned in society today. Then, this complex concept will be placed into the history of psychoanalysis to begin the process of understanding how it has been approached in the clinical setting and what new perspectives are being developed. This chapter will attempt to explore these significantly large histories with the purpose of encouraging the reader to be aware of how truly broad and varied the meanings assigned to racial identities are, and how new we are to addressing this dynamic in the clinical setting.

#### *History of Multiracialism and Race*

“Multiracial”-- this word has no definitive definition that runs true for all people in all circumstances. The word multiracial, grounded in decades of history, has had various meanings depending on the realm in which it was functioning (economics, sociology, psychology, communications, etc.). The array of meanings inherent in the word “multiracial” is rooted in the vagueness of the definition of race.

What is race? Is it a skin color, a category based on country of origin, a culture, or perhaps an experience? Defining this term is no easy task since it appears to have different meanings based on the realm of reference in which it is referred. The subjectivity of this concept is exactly what this writer hopes to establish as we begin to explore the concept of race and its history. If we, as clinicians, are going to work with a range of people we must attempt to understand their experience. This means having some grasp on the complexity of this concept and the variation in the ways it is applied in different societies. This understanding is what will allow us as clinicians to begin to appreciate the range of experiences that are internalized and incorporated into individuals' identities as they interact with social structures and dynamics that have been, and continue to be, influenced by race-based ideologies.

According to Banton (1977), the concept of race has evolved in a way that has allowed the old definitions to continue to function along with the new ones. By having this combined presence of definitions, the meanings of the word have grown as the concept of race has been applied to different groups of people in various environments. This concept is exemplified in the categories we use to define race today. For example, these categories are often based on both color and country of origin (i.e. Japanese, Indian, black, Asian, white, etc).

The shifting of meanings, or the evolving of the concept of race has touched on many different foci. These foci were once based on categories that stemmed from the visual observations of the first explorers and more recently these foci have stemmed from a range of theories said to be based in science. From here, we will review a few of the

various definitions the word “race” has had over the years as a way to begin of beginning to understand the many meanings that continue to be used.

According to Dalal (2002), acts that stem from what we now call racism existed prior to the creation of the term ‘race’. This idea speaks to the ways that the grouping of people based on physical appearances occurred prior to the first recorded use of the word ‘race’. While these groupings were not identified as being ‘racial’, they did acknowledge traits that would come to be seen as descriptors of race. The traits that often defined groups were nation of origin and class. Once colonization began to occur, Europeans began to have more contact with humans that were physically and culturally different from themselves. At this point, writers began to use words such as “devils,” “savages,” and “beasts” in conjunction with skin color descriptions (Dalal, 2002 p. 13). The negative views often came about after attempts to ‘civilize’ these new groups of people failed (Jordan, 1966) and in many cases, a forced occupation of the native people’s land occurred. Eventually, these targeted differences acted as ways to justify the dehumanization of people of color, to make them “less than” in every sense. According to Dalal (2002 pg 12), it is not a coincidence that these color lines or divisions among people mirrored the power dynamics that resulted from colonialism. As European society developed and the field of science progressed, the categorization of people based on purely explicit characteristics became less common as pseudoscientific classifications of the groups become more dominant.

It is important to acknowledge that the classifying and grouping of people primarily based on physical appearance and cultural practices led to a categorization system that is Eurocentric. The dominant European white culture was the norm and

standard that people from other cultures were measured against. This Eurocentric exploration and spread of knowledge through the domination of others through acts such as colonization has in turn given white Europeans the privilege of being invisible. According to Lipsitz (1998) “whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and racial relations” (p.1). This natural silence around whiteness creates an environment in which racial dynamics between white people and people of color can easily go silenced despite ongoing inequalities.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, many pseudobiological attempts at classifying differences between groups were based on a hierarchy. These attempts by Linnaeus (1758); Kant (1770); Cuvier (1817); Blumenbach (1875) and Knox (1850) mirrored the social dynamics that were created through colonization and slavery at the time (International Encyclopedia, 2008). A common thread among all of these theories is that they all refer to a hierarchy in which European/Caucasian/white is at the top and Black/African is at the bottom (Dalal, 2002). An important point to acknowledge is the way skin color was used to further describe cultural or personal characteristics such as being moral, having a cheerful mood or the level of one’s intelligence. These concepts are exemplified in Linnaeus’ work in which skin color was used in conjunction with general temperaments such as mute, choleric, sanguine, melancholy and relaxed. Robert Knox was one of the first theorists who endorsed the idea that skin color spoke to one’s intelligence when he stated “I feel disposed to think that there must be a physical and consequently, a psychological inferiority in the dark races generally” (Knox 1850, quoted in Banton 1987, pg 57). These first theories gained acceptance since they supported the



times power hierarchy of the time and aimed to secure the white persons superior position (International Encyclopedia, 2008). Although these specific theories are no longer seen as the definition of race, the dynamics they created and supported still carry on today in implicit ways. An example of this is in how to this day the White or Western culture continues to be seen as the norm while cultures from other races are seen as less of a priority.

Following the more categorically based groupings of races of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, scientists attempted to ground racial differences in science in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The idea that biology could be linked to the concept of race developed in response to Darwin's research which promoted ideas such as natural selection and evolution (Graves, 2001). The concepts of evolution and natural selection within a species provided society with a way to explain variations in physical traits between 'races'. Once again, a hierarchy was reinforced in which white people were seen as separate from people of color based on perceived biological differences that allowed white society to view themselves as being more advanced or refined based on the concept of evolution. This idea continued to support the social structures of the day by creating a scientifically grounded justification for the dynamics between white Europeans and people of color. It is important to remember that because colonization and slavery were thriving at this time, it was economically and politically advantageous for white Europeans to strengthen the current social dynamics and hierarchies. These dynamics and the general belief in a hierarchy helped justify the power structure, conditions of living, and, in some cases, genocide that occurred. These messages of inferiority and primitiveness were spread

throughout the world as white Westerners and Europeans continued to travel and colonize other parts of the world, specifically the United States.

As we begin to look more at the United States' history, we will turn our focus away from the concept of race to that of racism. Now that we have explored the way the defining of race has evolved over the years, focusing our attention on racism will allow us to begin developing an understanding of how race-based actions and structures have affected individuals here in the United States.

According to Dalal (2002), race does not exist since there is no biological argument for such, but racism does exist. Dalal (2002) describes racism as being “anything-thought, feeling or action-that uses the notion of race as an activating or organizing principle” (p.27). Dalal infers that racism is an action-based word that leaves us to see that to acknowledge race at all, we must first racialize a person and in some cases a behavior or characteristic. This concept of racialization is one that will be further discussed in relation to identity. Dalal's definition of racism is very similar to the way Tatum (1997) defines it. According to Tatum (1997), racism is “a system of advantage based on race” (pg.10). This is the definition that is being put forth in this paper. This definition acknowledges and distinguishes the system of advantage that has developed through years of macro/micro level power dynamics, from acts of racially discriminatory behaviors. To fully appreciate the depth of oppression that has occurred in the United States, one must remember that all acts of racism are part of a larger system of privilege and oppression that has primarily been based on the black- white interactions.

The United States' history regarding race does not exist separate from the racial hierarchy that was set up in Europe and carried around the world. A key dynamic that

was brought to the United States by European explorers and settlers was slave trade, something that remained a core of this country's history for many centuries. Although slavery itself has existed as far back as biblical times, the African slave trade is the first time that slavery was based on race (Darity, 2008). According to Darity (2008), American slavery was much more brutal than in other places and offered slaves and their children little opportunity to gain access to the part of society in which people were free and had more opportunities.

The first record of slavery in America is in 1526 when 500 hundred Spaniards brought with them 100 black slaves to what is now considered South Carolina (Loewen, 1995). Since then, slavery remained a dominant practice until the mid 1900's. This practice further enforced power structures based on skin color that were economically advantageous for dominant white people, and further more, for people who fell into the middle and upper classes.

According to Lipsitz (1998), the power structure that was established in the United States since the first slave was brought over set the groundwork for how all future immigrants of non-white decent would be treated due to the "possessive investment in whiteness." This possessive investment speaks to the way in which "contemporary whiteness and its rewards have been created and recreated by policies adapted long after the emancipation of slaves and even after the outlawing of segregation" (Lipsitz, 1998, p 4). These power dynamics that support specialized treatment can be seen in the events of the American Revolution, a time when British America was fighting for its freedom for its people, while continuing to rely on the slavery of people of color.

In the United States, the most commonly presented form of slavery in the media is that which stemmed from Africa. Although Africans did experience a particularly horrific form of slavery, other people of color such as the Native Americans and Asians were also used as slaves during periods of restricted immigration (Lipsitz, 1998). Despite the shared history of oppression between these groups, cohesion among people of color was not the norm. Over the years, various groups of people have benefited from oppressing other groups in ways that align them with the idealized values of white society. This type of behavior occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when some Native Americans had African slaves with the benefit of appearing civilized to the white man (Lipsitz, 1998). This want to align with dominant society is one that continues today and seems to serve the immediate relief of individuals and groups of people, but in the long run serves the larger purpose of perpetuating the hierarchies of dominant white society.

The hierarchies and power dynamics that were reinforced through slavery were not necessarily the result, but were perhaps the purpose that slavery served. This idea is supported by Lipsitz's (1998) concept of the possessive investment in whiteness. Lipsitz (1998) emphasized that this investment is supported through a range of ways that helped maintain the cultural dynamics that gave white people particular privileges. In the big picture, slavery was just a portion of a larger set of practices and policies that supported this investment.

In the mid-1900, following World War II and during the Cold War, the United States began receiving international criticism for civil right violations (Darity, 2008). This international recognition along with the organization of many civil right groups preempted a progression in the work of the civil rights movement. The 1960's brought

forth Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X, and the Black Panthers, Brown vs. Board of Education, the Freedom Riders, Rosa Parks, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Acts of 1965 and 1968. Many individuals during this period fought for equal rights while also fighting against the injustices that were occurring despite policy changes. This point in history is important to look at not just for the political results, but also for the change in beliefs and values that were occurring.

Many of the efforts during the civil rights movement stemmed from grass roots level work. The fact that groups of people were organizing to speak up against old policies, such as segregation, demonstrate a change in community thinking that was occurring. This change marks progress from the older beliefs that people of color were intellectually “less than” to the belief that they are biologically equal to white people and that they deserve equal opportunity. Going back to the concept that Banton (1977) referred to, although perspectives were changing during this era, old meanings did continue to exist along side the new ones causing ongoing acts of racism.

Despite the efforts to change policy regarding civil rights and the many ways the message of equality was made public by challenging old beliefs and power dynamics, we still face racism today. It has yet again evolved and looks a little bit different from before, but it is still very alive in the United States culture. This paper will not go into the details of the more recent dynamics of racism, but do know that it does still exist in the same realms that it has existed historically. On a macro level there is still mass inequality in the distribution of resources and on a micro level some of the old beliefs of inferiority still exist.

As demonstrated, the United States has an extensive history of racism that has affected generations of people. Until this point, this paper has not differentiated the history of mono racial individuals from those of a multiracial identity. This specific identity has had a unique history.

The multiracial identity is one that has posed a problem for the United States systems of categorization based on race. This multiracial identity confronts the concept of having races since it draws attention to the fact that although there is no biological division among humans, we still attempt to categorize them by race as if there is such a thing as a pure race. Over the years, the multiracial identity is what contributed to the one-drop rule. The one drop rule was a policy once used by the United States as a way of separating black from white (Tatum, 1997). This rule supported the idea that if a person has any African ancestry at all, no matter their appearance, then they are to fall into the black racial category (Tatum, 1997). What is interesting about this rule is that it was applied only to those with black ancestry. If an individual had less than ¼ heritage of any other race such as Japanese, then they were not considered to be of that race unless they chose to identify that way. This inequality speaks to the black/white dichotomy that has been so strong in this country's history.

The multiracial or biracial identity has been present in this country's history since the first slaves were brought. Historically this country policy's and culture did not support the idea of a multiracial child. It was not until 1967 that cross racial marriages were legalized (Shih, 2009, p.1) creating some semblance of political support for the multiracial child. This act not only acknowledged the controversy of cross racial relationships in public, but laid the ground work for bringing the multiracial identity more

explicitly into the political arena. Although the multiracial/biracial identity became more prevalent, it still posed a problem in a country that continued to live by the one-drop rule.

In 2000, 34 years later, the U.S. Census Bureau began allowing individuals to identify themselves as more than one race by checking off all racial categories that apply. From 2005-2007, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Hawaii has the highest percentage of biracial/multiracial individuals at 21.3% of the state's population. The next highest percentages are Alaska (7.2%); Oklahoma (6.0%) and California (3.3%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This portion of the population is reportedly 2.2% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

As exemplified by the 34 years it took for the U.S. Census Bureau to change its research measures, the movement towards the acknowledgement of individuals of multiracial identity and their varying experiences is slow moving. Factors which play into this exists on micro, mezzo and macro levels. According to Omi (2001), "racial hybridity reveals the fundamental instability of all racial categories, helps us discern particular dimensions of racialized power, and raises a host of political issues" (p. 249). Omi (2001) points out here the way in which the multiracial identity has drawn attention to this larger construction of 'race' and the ways it is used in the system of racism to perpetuate specific power dynamics in the United States culture.

The increase in awareness around the issues of multiracial identities has been a very controversial topic. Politically, this acknowledgement of a multiracial population was seen by some activists as a threat to the 'minority numbers' thus decreasing political influence (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). This political argument had an effect on the initial refusal to include the term 'multiracial' in the census. This conclusion was a

compromise between political activists and other groups, which claimed that the previous method of choosing one race forced multiracial individuals to deny other parts of themselves contributing to a “discrepancy between their chosen identity and their social experience” (Townsend, Markus & Bergsieker, 2009, p. 200). Despite the arguments that exist around the issue of labeling multiracial individuals as such, this portion of the population does continue to represent a growing portion of racialized individuals in America whose lives are shaped by their experiences and others’ perceptions.

Throughout the United States’ history there have been many occurrences of racism. As exemplified in the beginning of this chapter, racism occurs on all levels of a society and in many different ways. Racism is evident in our political history, our economic system, overall beliefs regarding civil and humanitarian rights and in our personal value and belief systems. The system of racism that continues to thrive in this country is one that sends implicit and explicit messages to individuals about who they are to society. This message is one that plays a role in our identity development process. Understanding these historic events and their effects on a mono-racial individual’s identity is no doubt important, but for the purposes of this paper, this writer asks you to reflect on how these events have affected the multiracial individual, a person who has historically been denied a racial identity by our country and in many cases by their own communities. What message have multiracial individuals received through our policies? How does society’s acceptance of them affect their sense of self? How do we understand their experience and do we have the language to process it knowing that it is silenced in the dominant western culture? These questions will be further addressed in the discussion section of this paper. It is recommended that these questions continue to



be considered as we now begin to explore the ways psychodynamic theory has addressed the issue of a racial identity.

### *Psychodynamic Theory and Race*

At this point, we are ready to move on to our exploration of the second portion of the phenomenon, the clinical setting. We have looked at what race is and how racism has affected individuals and racial discourse throughout history. We have also looked specifically at some of the history around the multiracial identity. Now, we will turn our focus to how race, and more specifically the multiracial identity, is viewed in the clinical setting. The clinical setting is the space in which a therapeutic relationship is developed. This relationship serves various purposes and works in different ways depending on the theory we use when looking at it. For the purposes of this paper, we will first look at some general themes regarding the history of racial dynamics in the clinical setting. Then we will narrow our focus by looking at specific theories that fall under the umbrella of psychodynamic theory. To end, we will address some of the research that is being done specifically on racial identities.

As a whole, psychodynamic theories are criticized for their tendency to reduce all things to matters of the individual (Mattei in Berzoff, pg 250). This tendency towards psychological reductionism has historically limited psychoanalysts' interests and studies in how greater social factors, such as racial dynamics, influence the individual.

According to Mattei (in Berzoff et al., 2008), psychological reductionism has periodically been taken to the extreme in viewing the social contexts as a place in which a person's internal conflicts are acted out, inferring a one-way dynamic between the individual and society. Due to limited historical interest in larger social dynamics, none of the major

psychological theories (drive theory, ego psychology, object relations or self psychology) directly reference racism (Dalal, 2002). This has presented a problem for modern academia and has led to a creative solution. Most modern writing regarding race or racism and psychodynamic theories approach the issue by addressing specific traits that are associated with racial dynamics and racism that are discussed in the main theories. The issues that are commonly addressed are; hatred, aggression, envy, power, instincts, conflict, identity, and the self (Berzoff et al., 2008; Dalal, 2002).

Despite current efforts to integrate racial dynamics into the clinical setting, we must remember that the silencing of racial issues and the general perspective that racial dynamics interfere in analytic work (Kennedy in Leary, 2000) is a part of our clinical history. The movement away from this perspective is a process, and seems to mirror general society's progress in vocalizing racial dynamics. As with society though, there is a tendency in psychodynamic work to speak of racial dynamics as though they are fixed or universal and pertain only to people of color (Leary, 2000) by allowing white privilege to be invisible. These perspectives, hold the potential for a reenactment in which the client's experience of oppression is silenced by expectations based on generalizations that stem from the dominant white/black dyadic dynamic. According to Leary (2000), this perspective or approach to treatment "emphasizes static, reified meanings and not the fluid production of a treatment process involving the elaboration of psychic reality and idiosyncratic fantasy" (pg. 128). Now that we have some idea of the criticisms that psychodynamic work receives regarding its ability to work with racial dynamics, let's turn our attention to some of the ways the core theories are being interpreted and applied to the concept of race and racism.

As with history, theories are grounded in specific cultures that existed at the time they were formulated. It is essential to remember this when looking at theories that originated during different points in history. To start, we will begin with drive theory, a theory that stemmed from the ideas of Freud.

Freud's work, based on the core concept of instincts, gave rise to two theories of instincts that provide different explanations of hatred and therefore different ideas regarding race and racism (Dalal, 2002). The first theory that Freud proposed was drive theory. This theory was based on the self-preservation instinct and the sexual instincts. This sexually-based theory is critical to understanding the lack of focus on race in psychoanalytic theory. According to Eng (2001), psychoanalysis has systematically encoded race as an issue of sexual development.

Freud's drive theory supposes that individuals experience inner conflict in relation to external and internal stimuli. In the book *Inside Out and Outside In*, Mattei (2008) supports the idea that racist dynamics stem from an expression of such unconscious conflicts. Dalal (2002) further breaks down this idea through his writings regarding how racism can be an expression of a sadistic instinct, and/or an expression of hatred for the external.

According to Dalal (2002), the sadistic instinct stems from the conflict of the pleasure principle (internal stimuli) and the reality principle (external stimuli). This conflict serves as the realm in which humans first experience aggression in the form of masochism. When this masochism is turned so that the individuals may experience pleasure at the expense of pain of another, we get the sadistic instinct. This sadistic instinct tends to target individuals in a weaker position ~~that~~ who offer less of a threat to

the individual's self-preservation instinct. If the targeted individual continues to remain a non-threat, then the dynamic comes to be one that can safely be repeated. Dalal (2002) acknowledges the limits of this theory since there is no clear reason for the sadistic instinct to be specifically acted out on a racialized individual. Although this limit is very realistic, the social dynamics of the time did target people of color and so this theory may be accurate in proposing a reason racist behavior is perpetuated.

Hatred for the external world is another realm in which racism may occur (Dalal, 2002). By using the same idea of conflict occurring between the internal and external world, Dalal (2002) proposes that all things external that are seen as pleasurable become internalized and part of the self, while all non-pleasurable things become externalized. This conflict creates a dynamic in which all things external begin to stand for all things not-self. When applied to the idea of race, all other racial groups will potentially come to be seen as external, therefore un-pleasurable and hated (Dalal, 2002).

Coming from a slightly different perspective, Mattei (2008) also grounds racism in our unconscious psychosexual conflicts. From this perspective, it is believed that repressed fantasies and conflicts between the id and the ego come to be seen as dark or black (Mattei, 2008). According to Kovel (2008), the repressed id will become "symbolically realized in the world as the forms of blackness embodied in the fantasy of race" (pg 252). In summary, those racialized as being black come to represent those repressed sexual and aggressive conflicts. This again ties us back to history in which the African became to represent all that was uncivilized or different from that which was refined and advanced.

The concept that the color black and therefore the racialized people can act as an object onto which internal conflicts are projected is also supported by Klein's theory regarding the paranoid-schizoid and depressive position (Dalal, 2002). According to Klein, the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions are not fixed (Mitchel & Black, 1995). These two positions initially represents that polarized experience a baby has in regard to the breast. The good breast provides nourishment and comfort to the child, while the bad breast represents the child's hunger which creates an internal pain that leads to destructive fantasies. The key to this theory is that the infant actually believes that his fantasies really do impact the object, whether it be good or bad. During the paranoid-schizoid positions, the infant splits the good breast from the bad breast as a way to cope with it's central persecutory anxiety. Once the infant comes to integrate both the bad breast and good breast, he begins to feel guilt or the depressive anxiety which leads to reparative efforts and the depressive positions, one in which the infant can see the object as whole and believe that the infant's love for it is reparative. According to Dalal (2002) this reparative process does not always occur, leaving the infant with two options—, to continue attacking the bad breast (projection) or to deny what it has done. Dalal (2002) proposes that one way of denying the aggressive fantasies towards the bad breast is to project it's badness into another object. This other object is utilized as a container, thus allowing the infant to progress into the depressive position. According to this, Dalal believes that the other in which the harm is projected is likely the black or the dark which then becomes the container on a societal level. So in summary, Dalal (2002) proposes that, through a Kleinian perspective, society itself may be projecting its internal

hate and internal fantasies of destruction onto the group of people that represent this darkness.

Both the Freud-based and Kleinian-based explorations of the potential workings of hate, aggression—, and therefore racism—, are based on the idea of projection. In the United States under the theory of Ego Psychology, projection became one of the defenses that the individual is seen to use in a self-protective manner. Once again, this theory is one that is grounded in the idea of conflict, and so defenses such as projection and displacement are used as a way to protect the self from some internal conflict. A key point that came about through the study of ego psychology under Erikson, is the idea that negative images are internalized. Mattei (2008) does point out that these internalizations can't be approached in a deterministic manner since racial minorities do also use their own set of defenses to battle the wounds of such projections and displacements of hate.

As we move on from the instinct/conflict-based theories of Freud, Klein and Ego psychology, we turn our attention to a group of theories that focus more on the idea of the self as being object-driven rather than instinct-driven. According to Mattei (2008), these more relationally based theories believe that “experience in relationships form the basis of our internal lives as well as our perceptions of the external world” (p.259). As a part of this focus on external objects, the infant becomes aware of separateness from their objects and their differences. According to Mattei (2008), our experience of our skin color (a very obvious difference) is based on the meaning we assign to it based on the messages we receive from our objects (caretakers, community, culture).

The work of Fairbairn, according to Dalal's (2002), is seen as very similar to that of Freud and Klein, but also crucially different. Fairbairn follows in their footsteps by

supporting a pattern in which good and bad is internalized and split and then projected, but the difference is in his perceptions of the purpose of the projection. According to Dalal's (2002) interpretation of Fairbairn's theory, "projection is a way of generating difference" (pg 54). Difference is not seen as the result of the projection, but rather the purpose of the projection. By creating the other or the difference, the 'us' is solidified and ensured since all bad becomes external to the group (Dalal, 2002). This theory offers a slightly different perspective on racism. It is proposing that racism, or the focus on the difference, is not the result of the projection, but is actually the purpose. To differentiate one's own group from another using projection makes the relationships within one group safe and trustworthy.

Self psychology, originating from the work of Kohut, offers a different perspective on the roots of where aggression or prejudice stems from. Self psychology is based on the concept that a person must grow up in a community to which they feel connected and in which they are empathized with in order for them to develop self-cohesion (Mitchell & Black, 1995). As the child develops, they need three different types of transferences, the mirroring transference; the idealizing transference; and twinship (Mitchell, 1995). These transferences occur through empathic attunement, which help the child feel real and acknowledged. When a child does not receive this, he or she experiences narcissistic trauma. According to Ryan & Buirski (2001), racism or prejudice can be looked at as stemming from this narcissistic trauma through the individual's reparative efforts. Ryan et al., identifies three dynamics through which prejudice is reparative for the narcissistic self. These dynamics suggest that prejudice can serve as a response to a threat; a distancing/protective mechanism; and an empowering

dynamic through the utilization of one's own sense of power, and through the oppression of another, and the elevation of one's self (Ryan et al., 2001). This perspective is different from those previously mentioned in that the aggression or prejudice is a protective response to a real harm that was externally produced and then internalized to become a part of a person's self organization. In the previous theories, the aggression originally stemmed from the internal world of the individual and was projected or displaced onto another in the external world.

Now that we have gone over the ways in which the major psychological theories formulate the roots of aggression and prejudice and have seen how it is applied to racism, we will turn our focus to the issue of identity. Racial identity is how we will now go beyond looking at the roots of racism, to exploring how being racialized in a racist society can affect a person's sense of who they are.

#### *Racial Identity in Society*

In the book *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in The Cafeteria*, Tatum (1995) describes identity as being an intersection of many factors such as gender, age, race, religion, and many others. Identity is seen as something that develops throughout our lives and has a various meanings depending on which aspect we focus on. According to Tatum, the areas in which our identity aligns with that of dominant society is often taken for granted and goes ignored, while the parts that we focus on are those that are not a part of dominant society (1997). The parts of our identity that do not align with dominant society are the parts that others pay attention to, making it a focus in our own eyes. Racial identity is one of the factors that make up an individual's whole identity. When our racial identity does not match that which is most common in our community,



then it becomes a focus or a target. This process is demonstrated in the way that being white has been given the privilege of invisibility, while the racial identities of people of color have consistently been targeted as different or other than. In the United States, messages about race are all around us. At this point we will briefly go over some of the research that has been developed regarding the multiracial identity process.

Multiracial individuals experience the racial identity in a different way than those of a mono-racial background. In the same way that the intersectionality of our identities individualizes our identities, the multiracial identity does the same but within the dimension of race. Within that one dimension of race the multiracial person is put in the position of negotiating who they are to themselves and to society depending on their community's acceptance of this identity. Unfortunately, as demonstrated through the history of race and racism, the multiracial identity was not seamlessly integrated into the United States racial categories.

Many studies regarding the developmental process of the multiracial identity have been done. These studies can be divided into two types based on their idea of what the goal of development is. The majority of the studies support that the goal of the developing racial identity is to become fully integrated (Milville et al., 2005). This means that a person will ultimately have one racial identity that is static, whether it is one of a mono-racial category, biracial or multiracial. The second category of multiracial identity development models proposes that the goal of development is for a person to have a fluid identity, one that is able to change based on the individual's context (Milville et al., 2005 and Shih & Sanchez, 2009). Another key difference between these two types of models is how they are structured. The models that aim towards one integrated static

identity are most commonly stage models (Poston, 1990; Kich, 1992 and Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995), while those that aim towards a fluid identity based on context allow for movement both backwards and forward throughout the developmental process (Root, 1996 and Rockquemore, 2002).

These identity models reflect the pressures that result from a society that has made racialization a norm. The stage theories propose that at some point all multiracial individuals reject a portion of their identity (Kerwin et al., 1995). This concept is based on a social dynamic that does not allow for the automatic acceptance of a multiracial individual, that is, someone that does not fit the dominant categorization system of the United States. The models that are more fluid allow for a non-linear progression that is not based on the expectation that all multiracial individuals will have to deny a portion of their identity at some point.

### *Summary*

The system of racism is a complex system of advantage that has normalized the division of power with racial oppression. This system has functioned in this world for centuries and continues to thrive as its definition evolves with societies. Racialization is still a norm in the United States that is internalized by most if not all people whether they are considered privileged or targeted. Throughout history those who identify with the dominant race have been awarded an invisibility that allows it to go un-targeted. This process has ensured that the primary focus of racial dynamics centers around issues that are primarily relevant to people of color, not to those who are white. This system and all of its messages regarding power, value, and ability, has become integrated into individuals' identities, identities that clinicians work with on a daily basis.

As we explored psychological theories, we found that they are primarily focused on how aggression (and its close ties with racism) comes to exist in individuals and how it is acted out upon others. All of these theories propose that acts of aggression and prejudice serve as a protective factor, whether it is from internal anxiety or from external threats. These theories have evolved over time just as the definition of race itself has. Aside from self-psychology, the psychological theories explored here in this paper do not necessarily address how racism actually affects a person. In this chapter, this issue was further explored through the study of the identity development models and their perspectives on some of the potential conflicts that arise through the development process regarding the pressure to form a static identity vs. the ability to have one that is more fluid in nature.

From here, this paper will explore the theories of intersubjectivity and cultural studies in the hopes of laying the groundwork so that we may further explore this phenomenon with the hope of combining perspectives and offering a more cohesive theory that will encourage clinicians to more thoroughly address the multiracial identity in the clinical setting.

## CHAPTER IV

### INTERSUBJECTIVITY THEORY

Intersubjectivity theory is a contemporary field theory that originated in the 1970's. Over the years, the number of contributors to this theory has grown and different variations have developed. For the purposes of this paper, this writer will be discussing intersubjectivity theory as it is conceptualized in the writings of Stolorow, R.; Atwood, G.; Brandchaft, B.; and Orange, D. These authors have collaborated over the years to create some of the foundational readings on this theory while also using its core concepts to analyze reified Cartesian ideas that have been living in the field of psychoanalysis for years (Stolorow, Atwood & Orange, 2002). From *this foundation*, this writer will define a few core concepts that will be applied to the focus of this thesis the multiracial identity in the clinical setting.

According to Stolorow & Atwood (1992), "intersubjectivity theory is a field theory or systems theory in that it seeks to comprehend psychological phenomena not as products of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms, but as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting subjectivities" (p. 1). This statement represents a transition from older psychoanalytic theories such as Freud, Klein, and Fairbairn that posited that psychological phenomena are a result of internal drives, energies or structures that are unconscious and isolated from the external world. This "myth of the isolated mind" is at

the core of much of the writing Stolorow, Atwood, Brandchaft and Orange have done (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, p.7).

The movement away from believing that the human mind exists in isolation appears to be at the root of intersubjectivity systems theory. This transition allows the authors to account for intersubjectivity. In *Concepts of Being* (2002), through the authors' discussion of the social, cultural or developmental ramifications of the myth of the isolated mind, it is concluded that this myth gives humans the illusion of self sufficiency and autonomy (the ultimate goal of development according to many developmental theories). By basing all psychological phenomena in the intersubjective field, the authors have placed individuals' self-esteem, identities and experiences in this same intersubjective field, something that is not 100% controllable or predictable (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). Stolorow & Atwood (1992) speculate that through the reification of the myth of the isolated mind or Cartesian thinking, humans have also isolated themselves from nature or mortality, social life and subjectivity itself (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). These effects will not be explored in more detail here, but they are important to acknowledge in order to appreciate how integrated this myth of the isolated mind has become.

One of the most obvious examples of the use of the myth of the isolated mind in psychoanalysis is the unconscious. Historically the unconscious was viewed as being rigid in the sense that the exploration of the unconscious was seen as not being influenced by the analyst. This idea of client as being isolated and acting out on the therapist through defenses such as projection, or projective identification solely for the purpose of reducing anxieties is an example of the role of the isolated mind in the therapeutic setting.

This myth is further exemplified through the belief that the therapist can be a ‘blank screen’.

Intersubjectivity theory proposes a different perspective of the unconscious. Stolorow & Atwood (1992), suggest that there are three realms of the unconscious; (1) prereflective unconscious, (2) dynamic unconscious, and (3) the invalidated unconscious. The prereflective unconscious is similar to the superego in that it consists of the unconscious principles by which all of our experiences are organized. A key difference between the prereflective unconscious and the superego is that the prereflective unconscious is fluid in the sense that it is developing throughout our lifespan because it is being formed within the intersubjective system of experience. The original or primary intersubjective experience is the one that exists between caregiver and child. This level of the unconscious is where treatment occurs in the therapy (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). Therapy is focused on the illumination of the contents residing within the prereflective unconscious and the new relational experiences that result from these explorations with the therapist (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). Due to the belief that the connection between the unconscious and the conscious is fluid, it is believed that one’s organizing principles are continually changing throughout life as one has ongoing affective experiences that occur within the intersubjective field. The intersubjective field is a system of “reciprocal mutual influence” that consists of the subjectivities of both participants and the transitional area or third space that is uniquely created by the two subjectivities (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, p. 3).

The dynamic unconscious is seen as being the source of resistance (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). This realm consists of repressed affective experiences that, if revealed,

threaten needed relationships or ties (i.e. the tie to the original caregiver) (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). Intersubjectivity theory supports the idea that all experience is met within the intersubjectivity system with either affect attunement or malattunement, and that it is this response that determines whether the child will further develop the articulation of a particular affect experience or will repress it out of fear that experience will negatively affect the vital tie to the caregiver. It is this threat that will power a resistance that aims to limit the chance that this malattuned affective experience will be revealed, or eventually become integrated into the individual's prereflective unconscious. Its integration may threaten the struggling prereflective unconscious, which is becoming attuned to the individual's experiences.

The third realm of the unconscious that is referred to in intersubjectivity theory is the invalidated unconscious. This realm of the unconscious consists of those affective experiences that never surfaced because they were never evoked by a "validating intersubjective context" (Stolorow, R. & Atwood, G., 1992, p. 32). This perspective of the unconscious, and how it is created, exemplifies the importance of an individual's affective experience in relation to the subjective field, a field that accounts for another's ability to influence the individual's experience through attunement or malattunement. This acknowledgment, of the mutually reciprocal influence individuals have on each other through their participation in an intersubjective system in which experiences are had, is the key to understanding the fluid unconscious, which is the basis of subjectivity.

Now that we have spent a little time understanding how intersubjectivity theory conceptualizes the individual's development of his or her unconscious and its connection to his or her conscious experiences, we will turn our attention to this theory's approach to

a few of the dynamics of the clinical setting. In the same way that the key to the individual's development is the person's affective experience in an intersubjective field, this theory identifies this field as the space in which therapy occurs. According to Stolorow, Brandchaft & Atwood (1987), the intersubjective approach in which both the client's and therapist's subjectivity is accounted for will enhance "empathic access to the patient's subjective world and in the same measure, greatly enhance the scope and therapeutic effectiveness of psychoanalysis" (p. 2). This acknowledgement of the therapist's subjectivity and the role it plays in the intersubjective field contradicts a core concept of analysis that stems from the works of Freud, the belief that the therapist can be neutral or a blank screen.

As in all interactions or relationships, the intersubjective field in therapy consists of both the clients and the therapist's subjectivities. This means that there are two unconscious' minds in the room that both have their own subjective interpretation of the world and their own motivations or interpretations based on their prereflective unconscious. The use of this intersubjective field in the therapeutic setting is proposed as being extremely beneficial (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992).

Therapeutic alliance is undoubtedly an essential part of therapy. Stolorow, Atwood & Brandchaft (1992) bring to attention a differing perspective on which the therapeutic alliance is based. Intersubjectivity theory views the therapeutic alliance as being based on Kohut's idea of sustained empathic inquiry (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). This means that the therapist is obligated to seek an understanding of the client's experiences from "within the patient's subjective framework". This level of commitment



to the client's subjective experience requires that the therapist considers his/her own subjectivity and view on perspectival realism.

Perspectival realism is a concept that is explored in the book *Worlds of Experience: interweaving philosophical and clinical dimensions in psychoanalysis* (Stolorow, R., Atwood, G., & Orange, D, 2002). When applied to psychoanalysis, perspectival realism speaks to the thinking that no one perspective holds the whole truth of reality. According to Orange, D. (1995), "perspectival realism recognizes that the only truth or reality to which psychoanalysis provides access is the subjective organization of experience understood in an intersubjective context". These authors have referenced the works of Nietzsche, Gadaer, Brentano, Husserl and Peirce in the contextual exploration of the concept of perspectival realism.

For Stolorow et al. (2002), perspectival realism's relevancy to clinical work is demonstrated in the three components of intersubjective clinical sensibility. The first component is the focus on the individual's organizing principles or prereflective unconscious. Second, they speak of self-reflexivity; the constant awareness by the therapist of his or her own presence and an awareness of the theories that are a part of the therapist's own subjective experience of the client's troubles. The third component of perspectival realism is that there should be no arguments about reality. These three components seem to speak to a belief in the ultimate subjectivity of everything, whether it be the fluidness of the prereflective unconscious, the therapists' own training and education or the existence of a definitive reality.

In addition to these author's writings on the myth of the isolated mind, the unconscious and on perspectival realism, they have also contributed some interesting

literature on the mind and body relationship and the integration of affective experience. We will now change directions here to look specifically at these portions of their writings.

In *Contexts of Being*, Stolorow & Atwood (1992) discuss the concept of the mind and body. Here they discuss the importance of affect to the theory of intersubjectivity and the developmental process that is undertaken for affect to go from bodily states to feelings in the mind. In order for this to happen, the authors propose that the child must be met with affective attunement, whether it be to a young child's bodily state or an older child's emotional experience. If the child does not experience this attunement and is not able to integrate a bodily affect into one symbolically based in the mind, the affects will remain in the unvalidated unconscious as a bodily affect that is not able to be symbolized in the intersubjective context. If a child's affective experience does become mentally symbolized and is met with malattunement, it will become repressed in the dynamic unconscious.

As a part of the discussion on the mind-body connection, Stolorow & Atwood (1992) touch on issues of somaticization, embodiment, and disembodiment. The mind-body connection is seen as something that can be used defensively as a sort of barrier or boundary that can be used to protect the self. An example that is given by the authors is in the case of sexual assault and the reported effect of feeling as though one is watching it happen from outside, a sort of disembodiment. Another example that is given is what can happen when one is criticized and seen as an object. The authors propose here that in an attempt to keep a tie to the criticizing caregiver/important other, the individual may leave their own malattuned experience in order to safely embrace an outside perspective,

leaving the body as “the focus of critical scrutiny and evaluation and often of intense shame and self-consciousness” (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992 p.48). This example is one that may be relevant to the experience of racism and the pressures of social norms that are enforced in an intersubjective field in which the targeted individual may be experiencing a level of criticism or malattunement.

The concept of the mind and body connection and the way it is developed through affect attunement and mental symbolization gives psychoanalysis a different perspective to use when looking at issues of psychosomatic states and embodiment and disembodiment. Stolorow & Atwood (1992) propose that the therapeutic approach to working with these issues is to help the client articulate their affective experiences in a attuned intersubjective field, thus allowing the client to integrate these affective experiences into their prereflective unconscious.

The majority of literature on intersubjectivity theory has been created by Robert Stolorow, George Atwood, Bernard Brandchaft and Donna Orange. This theory is relatively new in comparison to other psychoanalytic theories and no empirical studies using intersubjectivity theory were found by this writer. All writings cited are theoretical works that periodically consist of case examples. The following critiques of intersubjectivity theory are based on reviews of the writings of Stolorow.

Stolorow primarily did the greater portion of trauma work created by these authors after the loss of his wife. According to Stolorow, R. (Stolorow et al., 2002), pain does not equal pathology; trauma- based pathology stems from the absence of a responsive milieu. When this responsive milieu or intersubjective context is missing, one does not have the opportunity to integrate, contain or modulate their affective experience.

An aspect that Stolorow (2007) found that contributes to the access of an intersubjective context in which the experience may be explored is the sense that there is a split between the “traumatized ones and the normal ones” that is “essentially and ineradicably incommensurable” (p.15). This split serves the purpose of supporting whatever defenses the traumatized person has established to protect him/her self. Stolorow (2007) reflects, “experiences that are insulated from dialogue cannot be challenged or invalidated” (p. 15). This statement speaks to the anxiety that may be produced when one knows that their traumatic experience may be called into dialogue.

According to Stolorow & Atwood (1992), the anxiety that may be provoked, simply by the traumatized individual knowing that a therapist may possibly have an interest in knowing their experience may itself re-traumatize the client. This is what makes trauma work so delicate. All the ideas of intersubjectivity theory regarding empathic understanding of the client’s subjectivity and awareness of the therapist’s participation in the intersubjective field become that much more critical when working with a traumatized individual. Stolorow & Atwood (1992) emphasize that when working to reveal one’s prereflective unconscious, all analytic failures must be addressed and investigated from within the client subjective experience and organizing principles.

Tobin, S. (2002) reviewed the article ‘Cartesian and Post-Cartesian Trends in Relational Psychoanalysis’ by Stolorow, Orange & Atwood (2001). In this review, Tobin (2002) found that the authors are very abstract and give little example of how to work intersubjectively in the clinical setting. Tobin (2002) also discussed his perspective that the authors underestimate clinicians in Western cultures when working intersubjectively due to a tendency to “separate ourselves from our actions and from the environment

linguistically and, inevitably, in our consciousness” (p. 5). After a review of a portion of the literature, it appears that this critique is not echoed elsewhere.

In another review of intersubjectivity theory, Trop, Burke & Trop (2002) argue that the language of intersubjectivity itself reifies structuralism, a concept that is frequently critiqued by the authors Robert Stolorow, George Atwood, Bernard Brandchaft & Donna Orange. This criticism speaks specifically to the authors writing on their version of the unconscious. Trop, Burke & Trop (2002) argue that by creating the three realms of the unconscious the authors are subscribing to a form of structuralism. This critique does not comment on the authors’ writings on the fluidness of the unconscious and the lifelong development that occurs as new affective experiences are had in the intersubjective context.

In this chapter we have reviewed the theory of intersubjectivity systems theory. The intersubjective theorists have taken a contextualist approach to all of their writing, integrating concepts from phenomenology, such as the Cartesian mind and perspectival realism. They have proposed an intersubjective approach which is grounded in a field which consists of one’s own subjectivity and that of others. Our affective experiences of the intersubjective field are created through a system of mutual influence that is at the core of our unconscious. According to the intersubjectivity theory our unconscious is proposed to be made of these affective experiences. These experiences continue to influence our subjectivity and our perspective of what portion of reality to which we may have access. Intersubjectivity systems theory continues to be conceptualized by these authors and substantiated in the field of psychoanalysis. Although variations of this theory exist, critiques of these authors work are limited.

## CHAPTER V

### CULTURAL STUDIES

The field of Cultural Studies was developed at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in England. In 2002, CCCS closed under controversial circumstances due to a restructuring of the university. The CCCS closure is cited as occurring on the “against a backdrop of the outcome of the 2001 research Assessment Exercise” (Curtis, 2002). As with everything, the definition of cultural studies is limited by temporality and spatiality. This definition naturally varies depending on the context, that is when in history and where in the world a phenomenon is being examined. Through this writer's readings though, the following definition appears to be the most appropriate one for the purposes of this paper. Grossberg, L. (2007, p.2), a scholar of this field, defines cultural studies as:

A project not only to construct a political history of the present, but to do so in a particular way, a radically contextualist way, in order to avoid reproducing the very sorts of universalisms (and essentialisms) that all too often characterize the dominant practices of knowledge production, and that have contributed (perhaps unintentionally) to making the very relations of domination, inequality and suffering that cultural studies desires to change. Cultural studies seeks to embrace complexity and contingency, and to avoid the many faces and forms of reductionism.

This definition seems particularly relevant to the focus of this paper, the multiracial identity in the clinical setting. This identity is often overlooked in a field that has been grounded in analytic theory and one, which has historically been constructed in opposition to a dominant identity, which is western, male, and heterosexual.

The multiracial identity belongs to the larger conjuncture (Grossberg, 2006) of racial identity. To view racial identity as a conjuncture means that one must constantly hold that racial identity is not just an item, it is an “articulation, accumulation, or condensation of contradictions” (Grossberg 2007, p.5). According to Grossberg, a conjuncture functions on multiple axes and is in a constant search of balance “through a variety of practices and processes of struggle and negotiation” (2007, p. 4). This is particularly relevant given the discussion covered in Chapter III regarding the continuous struggle and change that the concept of race has undergone throughout history as society and therefore culture has changed. The complexity that surrounds the development of an individual’s racial identity is what this paper has attempted to put into focus. The development of an individual’s racial identity and especially one that is a multiracial identity is informed by the complexity of the conjuncture, and is constantly being influenced by ongoing changes in the prevailing society. Cultural studies places a strong emphasis on actively working with identity as a conjuncture in order to not fall victim to reductionism.

In an effort to take a step back and look at the larger system of knowledge that surrounds our understanding of the concept of race, we now turn our focus to the work of Stuart Hall in the book *Modernity and its Futures* (1992). It is here that Hall addresses society’s movement towards post-modernism and the belief that identity is becoming

more and more fragmented and that an individual is no longer seen as holding one cohesive identity (p. 274). Hall (1992) distinguished between three concepts related to identity development: Enlightenment subject, Sociological subject and the Post-modern subject.

The Enlightenment subject is a centered and unified individual who has an inner core that emerges at birth and remains essentially the same throughout development. This subject resembles Freud's conceptualization of infancy and the subsequent stages of development. This infant is seen as being born with a set core, an identity and personality, which is then acted out upon the world. For the Enlightenment subject, the core does not change throughout development, it simply gains the ability to more fully express its innate self, whether this involves his or her identity, personality or drives.

For the Sociological subject the core is viewed as being less autonomous and innate. The core of the Sociological subject is developed in relation to important others. The subject (individual) develops and changes over time as influenced by others and by the cultural context. The sociological subject although seen as more open and interactive is still considered to have one un-contradictory cohesive core. Hall (1992) defines this subject's developmental process as though "we project ourselves into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them part of us" (p. 276). This subject is very similar to that described in object relations and self psychology.

The Post-modern subject is viewed as having no fixed cohesive identity. The Post-modern subject is in constant flux in relation to the ways the subject is "represented or addressed in the cultural system which surrounds us" (Hall, 1992, p. 277). The Post-



modern subject has multiple identities that are sometimes contradictory. According to Hall, this ability to have multiple identities speaks to the aptitude of the subject's identities to be moveable and continuously formed within ever changing cultural systems, which are based in history and dependent on space and time. The post-modern approach allows for an understanding of the "interplay between subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which those fragile, meaningful subjectivities are formed" (Gilroy, 2000, p.98). Although this post-modern approach is becoming more prevalent, the culture of the United States does continue to value and emphasize the importance of inclusion and exclusion in the form of race, cultural heritage, sexuality, etc. This contradiction between the ongoing value put on the pure definable identity mixed with a movement towards the acceptance of the fluidity of identity exemplifies why the phenomenon of the racial identity is a conjuncture.

The progression over time through an understanding of the context that shaped the development of the Enlightenment subject to that that shaped the development of the Sociological subject and now to that which has shaped the development of the Post-modern subject is by no means simple and clean. The progression through these contexts appears to parallel society's advancement in other areas such as philosophy, psychology, and anthropology. In the same way that the newer definitions of race are not separate from those of the past, the periods of history and thought that influenced identity development are not distinct as well. Values and meanings from the enlightenment context and from the sociological context continue to be present as the post-modern context is developing. Now that we have spent a little of time looking at the history of identity development using cultural studies writings, we will look into the processes that

occur in the creation and articulation of racial identity which as a conjuncture represents an accumulation of contradictions.

In *Against Race: imagining political culture beyond the color line*, Paul Gilroy (2000) explored the historical importance of inclusion and exclusion in relation to the formation of the racial identity. Gilroy states that “we are constantly informed that to share an identity is to be bonded on the most fundamental levels: national, racial, ethnic, regional, and local” (2000, p. 99). This historical need for inclusion and exclusion has served the purpose of helping individuals to define their boundaries and make sense of the world by creating an “us” and a “them.” According to Gilroy (2000), this “magical connection” between those within a group is very powerful and the process of defining the ‘us’ and the ‘them’ is ultimately political (p.99). Identity making or what we will now refer to as identification (Hall, 1996), the process through which an individual comes to have an identity, is political and is the basis on which absolutism and division is created (Gilroy, 2000 p.99). Therefore, identification and the creation of boundaries is ultimately based on the identification and enforcement of difference.

The concept of the “different” or the “other” is one that has been repeatedly noted in this paper. According to Grossberg (as cited in Hall, 1996), difference is based on a “relation of negativity” in which the subordinate figure becomes necessary for the dominant figure to exist. This dependency which is based on the existence of the other gives the person who is regarded as dominant, the power to create a public image of the other while silently firming up the boundaries of his/her own group. This idea is supported by Said’s *Orientalism* (2003) in which the dominant figure constructs the other as repressed and exotic thereby securing the others less-than status while emphasizing the

dominant group's difference and solidifying their group unity. This concept is one that has carried over into social work literature in the form of acknowledging the ability for the dominant white group to not be required to define themselves, while the "other", who is a member of the targeted group, is being defined in opposition to the dominant group (Lipsitz, 1998). Through the exploration of the literature we have been reviewing, it is becoming clearer how members of the dominant group can have a significant investment on making sure that members of the subordinate groups remain identified as different. If the subordinate were to obtain defining characteristics that resemble the dominant, then the unity of the dominant group becomes threatened. This idea brings us back to our examination of the phenomenon, the multiracial identity in the clinical setting.

In the dominant's need to define the other for the purpose of substantiating difference and hierarchy, the issue of hybridity or, in regards to race, multiraciality becomes a very threatening issue. Grossberg (1996) defines hybridity as existing between two identities. This position means that the multiracial individual is different than both defined alternatives. According to Grossberg (1996), this "between-ness does not construct a place or condition of its own" (p. 92), it is a symbol that reflects the mobility, uncertainty, and multiplicity of the fact that the boundaries are not solid. This "border-crossing" (Grossberg, 1996) draws attention to the fluid-ness of the borders and therefore can threaten the dominants' unity and society's need to create boundaries by defining the other. In the creation of difference there is an inherent assumption that the dominant and subordinate groups are pure. Gilroy (2000) points out that when this concept of hybridity is applied to that of nationality/ethnicity/race, it threatens the pure-ness and therefore the validity of the boundaries and the meanings of both the dominant

and the subordinate groups. Reflecting on this dynamic, Gilroy (2000) states “different people are certainly hated and feared, but the timely antipathy against them is nothing compared with the hatreds turned toward the greater menace of the half-different and the partially familiar” (p. 106). This partially familiar goes against a power ridden structure by being new and undefined.

In *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996), Hall supports that identity is created across difference. He also supports that identity is the articulation of racial discourse. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1996) defines discourse as “a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and in its concrete contexts such as history and institutions.” The discourse that provides the context in which racial identity is formed in the United States consists of language, culture and institutions such as schools and government. All of these things have developed throughout this country’s turbulent racial history. The aspects of racial discourse that are articulated are based on time and location. This means that the articulation of racial discourse in the south is likely different from that of the northwest and that it would also look different depending on when in history it is being articulated.

When reflecting on the discourse in which an individual’s racial identity is formed, Hall (1996) acknowledges that identity is constructed out of modalities of power which mark difference. Hall (1996) points out that “identities are temporary points of attachment to subject positions which discursive practice constructs for us.” This means that if identity is developed within a racial discourse which is articulated through identification or racialization, then one of the effects on the individual may be that he/she will become tied to a location within racial discourse and all articulations of meanings

and power that make it up. For example, during World War II, many Japanese in America considered themselves Americans, but were racialized as Japanese/Asian. This racialization tied them to a location in the racial discourse of the time that consisted of negative stereotypes and a status of inequality that limited their access to land rights, social equality and citizenship. Now obviously, the racial identity is not the only identity an individual holds and so this process is not deterministic in nature. It is a process though that likely occurs and may result in different meanings for an individual; meanings that are a part of how the individual is seen in society and perhaps how he or she sees him or herself.

So where does this leave the individual? Here they are, developing in a culture which has been influenced by a country's racial discourse from which they have been racialized and to some extent assigned particular descriptions which exist within power dynamics. Racialization is bidirectional in that it is both chosen and forced upon a person. Although an individual may take an active role and pride in their racial identity it is inevitably linked to the many meanings and power dynamics of racial discourse that are continuously articulated differently depending on time and space. To better understand this conjuncture let us first look into the issue of spatiality.

In the previous paragraphs, we discussed the idea that through the process of identification/racialization a person becomes tied to racial discourse in which they become located spatially. As stated before, this location ties the person to racial discourse and its system of meanings and power. These meanings have been historically articulated through a system of hierarchy and power which create a spatial system in which an individual's access to knowledge and experience is based on his/her location.

This location is not simply determined and is not static, it is fluid and based on the intersectionality of all the identities that a person may hold (race, gender, sexuality, class, etc). This location is also linked to the physical location of a person and the history of knowledge that exists in that location and the individual's access to such knowledge. According to Grossberg (2006), these spaces are "products of efforts to organize a limited space" which then creates rules of mobility. Because racial discourse is based on difference and boundaries, access to these various spaces/experiences is restricted and therefore affects the individual's agency.

When holding multiple identities, whether they be related to race, class, gender, or culture, the locations, which the individual temporarily and conjointly holds for all of them affects, his/her access to knowledge and experience and therefore affects their subjectivity. When conceptualizing how the idea of spatiality affects an individual who holds a multiracial identity we must consider how they can hold multiple locations based solely on the meaning of their racial status. They hold different locations based on society's perception of their separate racial identities; their appearance; and their combined racial identities. An individual may also hold different locations based on his/her immediate community's perceptions and their family's perceptions. So when considering an individual's agency as related to their racial identity, this theory supports that we must first consider the person's social location based on where he/she is perceived to be in the system of race and how this affects his/her ability to access various experiences.

We will move to the discussion chapter in which this author attempts to integrate the meanings derives from each other the two theories as they relate to the phenomenon

being studied. From this chapter on cultural studies we will take the idea that racial identity is a conjuncture, an understanding of the different perspectives of identity (enlightenment, sociological and post-modern), the role of creating difference, and lastly the effects of boundaries and power dynamics on hybridity, spatiality and agency.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

#### *Case Study*

I am a 25 year old female who is most often racialized as multiracial. I am careful in my wording of my identity on purpose. My resistance towards this label is something I will be discussing in this chapter. I was born and raised in Hawaii as the youngest of three. Inevitably, my initial understanding of my racial identity was formed by my family and my community, in the context of my culture. As I have grown older and relocated to different parts of the country, my racial identity has changed in response to the culture of the places in which I lived. It has also changed in response to my own deepening understanding of racial discourse and the system of racism in this country.

My racial/cultural heritage is something that my family has taught me to value. My family made efforts to teach me and my siblings about our cultural heritage from all sides of our family. This included my maternal family who is English, German and Irish and my paternal family who is Puerto Rican, Spanish and Okinawan. My mother was raised primarily in southern New Mexico and later relocated to the Midwest. My father was raised in Hawaii and later moved to the Midwest for college. Of course, over generations the cultures of my ancestors was subjected to reinterpretation and alteration, but none-the-less my family always emphasized knowing where my family was from, who they were and what traditions and values the family has carried on.



Outside of my family, my racial identity felt like it was in constant flux. From an early age I received negative messages from my peers about my racial identity.

Throughout the majority of my school years, I only recall having maybe 2-3 white peers in my grade level. The majority of my peers were biracial or multiracial and considered “local”. In my elementary school years, I remember being teased by peers for my white heritage while my paternal heritage was frequently met with surprise. During these crucial developmental years, I began to recognize the negativity that was assigned to my whiteness by my peers and ultimately by the culture in which I lived. It was at an early age that I began to question what my perceived race meant to others. I began to feel uncomfortable identifying as “local” due to my peers focus on my whiteness. However, identifying as white was not an option based on physical appearance. In retrospect, I realize that some of my attentiveness to the issue of my racial identity growing up was likely enhanced due to my mother’s stories of being targeted because of being white.

At an early age I learned that my family’s relocation back to Hawaii was influenced directly by the racial dynamics of the large Midwest city my parents and brothers were living in. The city where my family lived in the 1970’s prior to my birth had experienced a wave of immigration. As a result this raised my parents’ awareness of the possible repercussion my brothers could experience if they continued to live in this location. My parents had noticed an increase in race-based violence in the area and became concerned for the family. This is most often noted as one of the major reasons my family moved back to Hawaii, a place my parents had not lived since the early 1960’s. This move, while beneficial for my brothers and my father, was not always beneficial for my mom. Throughout my life, I was told stories of race based

discrimination that she experienced. As I got older, I began to notice the ways that my mother was treated in the community.

I remember one specific incident during which the staff at a local takeout restaurant continued to take others' orders in front of my mom despite her being in line before them. I watched this occur from the car and was shocked at the blatant discrimination. I proceeded to go into the restaurant and ask my mom what was taking so long. Immediately the worker looked at me and said "I'm so sorry, what can I get you" while never looking at my mother. As with many incidents involving race, racial discrimination was not explicit, but knowing my community's culture, it was very clear to me that this incident was race based. Other incidents like this occurred throughout my childhood in combination with stories I heard from my mom and the community regarding "kill ha'ole" days that took place ~~in~~ throughout the islands in schools and on the streets up until the 1980's. "Ha'ole" currently refers to white individuals. The word can be translated as person without breath and traces back to the first pioneers who would not participate in the exchange of breath, a Hawaiian greeting called "honi".

At this point, I want to acknowledge my hesitancy about sharing this part of me since my story has been met with confusion or doubt regarding the racial dynamics of Hawaii. Institutional racism does exist in Hawaii and many white people have received historical, fiscal and educational advantages. Along side this, however, the racial discourse in Hawaii has continued to be articulated in ways that encourage the social targeting of white individuals. I am not saying that Hawaii has not suffered from oppression, or that the social dynamics are not an understandable response of a community that often views itself as being stolen. Since the phenomenon is the

multiracial individual in the clinical setting, my focus in relaying my story is on the meanings I assigned to the messages I received and how those meanings have affected me as an individual. From here I will discuss the ways that these dynamics have affected my process of my developing racial identity.

The negative messages regarding my partial whiteness and my identification with my mother affected my ability to feel comfortable with my identity and to develop any sense of pride regarding it. Prior to my return to Hawaii as an adult, I never truly felt comfortable calling myself “local” because I felt that I had to account for my whiteness. Growing up with a group of close friend who identified as “local” also influenced this. During my teenage years when I began to be more social and active in community events, I often felt that my peers silenced me. It felt like my own experiences as a “local” person were silenced or not valued as much due to my whiteness. I had learned at this point that any unacceptable behaviors by a white person often brought up the issue of the negativity of their race. This contributed to me feeling insecure in my knowledge of the culture and community in which I had lived my whole life. I lived with knowing that at any time my voice, my opinions, my ideas, could be silenced or dismissed with a simple mention of my whiteness. In this way, I felt oppressed. At the same time though, my multiraciality also gave me some advantages in the community by affecting my ability to access certain social groups, even if my voice was not equal. Around the age of 17-18, I began to feel more comfortable in identifying as “local.” I felt that I was an active member of my community and that I was known beyond my race. I believe that other aspects of my identity had become stronger, thus leaving me feel more cohesive and understood. This all changed once I moved away for college.

At the age of 18 I moved to the Pacific Northwest to attend college. This experience was a difficult one for me. As with many 18 year olds my identity was not solidified and I was not secure in who I was. Moving to a school that was primarily white was very hard for me in regards to my racial development. I yet again found myself in a place where I did not fit. I was not white, I was not black, I was not latino. People would frequently ask me where I was from and what my race was. I originally attempted to share my “local” identity with others by telling them I was from Hawaii. This was often met with a fascination about the state and very little interest in who I actually was. It was at this point that I adapted the term multiracial. This term felt easier to me. It felt like it saved me from saying that I was “local.” It saved me from having to explain myself. At the time, I felt that the term multiracial was a help to me, it gave me an identity, an identity that existed in this country’s racial discourse. Over time, I withdrew socially and felt completely out of place. This of course was not solely due to my racial identity issues, but they did play a large part. I yet again began to feel that I wasn’t understood. It was at this point in my life that I first experienced racism due to my skin color. I remember being enraged and shocked that someone could view me so negatively just based on my skin color and other physical attributes. This experience was different from my other experiences in Hawaii in that those were not simply based on my color. This experience of racism is one that I remember triggering a sort of reassurance in me that I did not belong.

After living in the Northwest for a couple years I returned to Hawaii feeling as though I was in the midst of an identity crisis. This was influenced by a combination of social experiences, but I now feel that most of it was due to my experiencing a sort of

culture shock. Upon my return, I immediately felt a sense of relief and familiarity. I knew who I was and the culture I was in was my own. I once again began to become more confident in my local identity. I no longer used the term multiracial. It no longer served the purpose of making me fit into a system. This time, I became confident in my “local” identity and felt that my understanding of my identity was being reflected by my community. This now brings us to the most recent stage in my racial identity development. After a few years in Hawaii I moved to the Northeast for graduate school.

The graduate program I’m a part of is one that has cross country placements. During my years in the program, I’ve resided in the northeast for classes, and two metropolitan areas, one in the northwest and one in the northeast. To my surprise, it was not the communities or the cultures that brought about further exploration of my racial identity, but my school’s curriculum. Smith College School for Social Work has an anti-racism statement and has incorporated this goal into the required curriculum. In class discussion regarding racial identity I yet again felt the urge to call myself multiracial in order to more easily be understood. I once again felt that I was limited by existing language and expectations of who I am and what experiences I may have had. I was being confronted with familiar race issues along with some new ones. For the first time in my life I was being called a person of color. This phrase alone frustrated and confused me due to its assumed political correctness and mass use. I remember being frustrated with this label that was being assigned to me when it wasn’t a phrase that I felt comfortable with. I continue to struggle with this phrase and its reference to a color, a trait that I have always considered to be a part of a long history of racism in this country. I continue to feel that this phrase supports racism by continuing to label and group people

by their skin color. Being incorporated into this grouping left me feeling silenced and alone in a community where it appeared to be the most politically correct phrase. This silence was admittedly continued due to my own lack of confidence in addressing issues of race in a public forum. This silence continued into my anti-racism courses in which I felt that my experience wasn't represented and that I did not have the confidence or the composure to present it myself. I was often afraid that I would be alone in this experience and that it would once again lead to a lack of understanding of my culture. I also think I had and continue to have a fear that my story will be found not worthy because it feels unequal to those typically referenced by the black/white dichotomy. Although my experience of my time at school has been beneficial and that the curriculum alone is not to blame for my being silenced, I do continue to struggle with the limits of racial discourse. The limits of existing language, and the limits of the narrative of this country's racial history, seems to dwarf contrasting narratives by ignoring them, or by attempting to make them fit the existing discourse.

So at this point I once again identify as "local". I am now more comfortable in my struggle with racial discourse and society's need for me to be identifiable. For myself, at this point, I cannot comfortably identify myself as multiracial. Although this term was easier at times, I now realize that it was actually costing me. I was sacrificing my own sense of identity for the sake of fitting others racial understanding. The word multiracial was a constant reminder that I did not fit and that I am not just one race. In many ways my comfortableness with my identity is a result of my understanding of who I am within a system. For my own sake I've decided to not identify within it by choosing an identity that is based on race. While the word "local" holds more accurate meanings

for me in its reference to a mixed ethnic and cultural heritage of a community, it does also bring about a sense of guilt for not choosing a racially based identity. Although I do see racial identities as an articulation of a racial discourse based on power, they are also valued in this society. The guilt that I feel for distancing myself from this system and from society's value on racial heritage can be seen as an example of the power that this system of race has in this country's culture and the value systems of families and individuals.

I understand that my experiences may not hold true for all and may possibly offend others who are trying to solidify their perceptions of race. It is here that I want to make use of the concepts of hybridity, as discussed in cultural studies, and perspectival realism as discussed in intersubjectivity theory. The threat of hybridity, due to its tendency to bring to light the limits of the racial boundaries that society has created (Grossberg, 2003), helps to explain the negativity I have experienced when telling my story related to my racial identity development. This negativity has in turn silenced me and often left me feeling that my story is not valid since it does not correspond to the more published story of the black/white discourse or to that of the victims of the Japanese internment camp. My experiences may have admittedly been nowhere near as oppressive as those of others, thus drawing attention to the subjectivity of these types of experiences. It is this subjectivity that perspectival realism acknowledges. No one truth can be known to anyone, we each hold just a portion of reality. This glimpse into my racial identity development has been offered as a way of challenging the prevailing racial discourse and the oppressing affects that can result from acknowledging only a few of the possible perspectives that actually exist. I hope that by sharing my perspective that this may be

helpful and can encourage clinicians to be open minded to the range of possibilities that exist regarding how an individual constructs meanings of his/her own racial identity. This is particularly true when such development occurs in a context where racial structures are more fluid and less concrete.

### *Intersubjectivity and The Phenomenon*

The first theory this author looked into was intersubjectivity theory. The concepts we will be using from this theory in our discussion of the phenomenon are the intersubjective field; the structure of the unconscious; and perspectival realism (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Stolorow et al., 2002).

The intersubjective field consists of both the client and the clinician's subjectivities. This field is at the core of intersubjectivity theory in that it is not only the location in which therapy occurs, but also the space in which each person develops. As we grow and develop throughout our lives, the meanings we take from our affective experiences are created in this intersubjective field. The intersubjective field is continuously co-constructed by the participants' conscious and unconscious contributions.

The intersubjective field is of particular importance when working with an individual who holds a multiracial identity, whether they self-identify or not. As discussed in the phenomenon chapter, there is little clinical literature that currently addresses the multiracial identity (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2008). The black/white dichotomy has become a part of our culture's understanding of the racial hierarchy through its prevalence in historical documentation (textbooks, movies, books). Because this issue has become a large part of our basic understanding of racial dynamics in



America, clinicians must be aware of how their understanding of racial dynamics and of how their expectations related to a client's experiences can have a reifying or an oppressive effect on that client.

In Chapter IV on intersubjectivity theory, we discussed the unconscious and the role of attunement and mal-attunement. Intersubjectivity theory proposes that all therapy takes place in the work with the client's prereflective unconscious (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). The prereflective unconscious of a multiracial individual will depend on the affective experiences, which that individual has had. When working with the prereflective unconscious, the clinician's approach should be that of open curiosity. This curiosity should focus on exploring how the multiracial individual understands race and its affect on his/her identity. Just as the clinician must be aware of his/her own perceptions and organization of racial discourse, the clinician must gain an understanding of the client's racial subjectivity in order to be aware of what role racial dynamics will play in the intersubjective field. Working to understand another's perceptions of a system that is often presented as having defined boundaries and rules can be difficult. An ultimate respect for the subjectivity of others and of our own is critical to developing an empathically based alliance with a client who holds a multiracial identity.

When working to understand a multiracial client's organizing structures (the prereflective unconscious), the clinician must be aware of any resistance that may appear should experiences stored in the individual's dynamic unconscious be revealed. The dynamic unconscious is seen as the source of resistance in treatment (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). It is within this sub-structure that repressed affective experiences are held (Stolorow, & Atwood, 1992). The experiences that were once met with mal-

attunement and incorporated into the dynamic unconscious, hold the threat of jeopardizing an important tie if revealed (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). It is here that a multiracial person may hold an understanding of their racial identity that differs from that which is contained in their pre-reflective unconscious and possibly different from that which would be suggested by the predominant discourse on racial identity. Exploring these experiences with a client before an alliance is formed could be dangerous because it may not only threaten important ties an individual may have, but it may also threaten their general organizing principles that are a part of the prereflective unconscious.

In this case study I discussed ongoing struggles I have had anytime I have lived on the mainland. My understanding and organization of race was developed primarily during my time in Hawaii. This organization led me to be internally ashamed of my whiteness while also overtly defensive of it due to my alliance with my mother. It also contributed to feelings of shame I have for not being Hawaiian. I was ashamed of all aspects of my ethnicities because they did not perfectly fit into Hawaii's values, but at the same time I was also proud of my achievement of a "local" identity.

My time at Smith has challenged me with its curriculum on race and racism for many reasons. First of all it made me aware of white privilege. This awareness made me defensive because I could not figure out how to hold Hawaii's explicit social targeting of white individuals with an empathy for the institutional racism that occurred in the state. Incorporating the idea of white privilege into my understanding of Hawaii's racial dynamics threatened my tie with my mother. I felt lost between my need to defend her experiences as well as my own, while also trying to appreciate the reasons this social targeting existed in Hawaii. I continue to feel torn over this. This dynamic is just one

example of how nuanced a multiracial individual's identity may be. In many ways I feel shame for all that I am, while I also feel proud of all that I am.

Using intersubjectivities conceptualization of the unconscious offers another way of understanding my experiences as noted in the preceding paragraph. In short, my prereflective unconscious is exemplified in my understanding of the values of my different racial identities. Overtime aspects of my dynamic unconscious, in terms of feeling shame for my white identity, surfaced and made me begin to reorganize my current conceptualization of the racial system and who I am within it. This process felt like a threat to my tie to my mother due to her white identity and her distancing from her white privilege. The complexity of my location within the system is what has left me feeling shame and pride all at once. This is my reality at this point in my life.

The concept of perspectival realism from intersubjectivity theory may prove helpful to clinicians who want to remain open to exploring a client's subjectivity. The concept of perspectival realism refers to the understanding that the only truth we have access to in therapy is the "subjective organization of experience understood in an intersubjective context" (Orange, D. 1995). Clinicians cannot fully know a client's reality and cannot truly keep it separate from that of their own. This makes the intersubjective field even more important. None of us holds the whole reality, but we each have little pieces of it.

Throughout my development I did have experiences where my ideas were not completely met with attunement, but they were met with empathy. This empathy, received from others, and that of mine for them, allowed for an exchange of experiences that gave me the opportunity to broaden my own understandings. In the phenomenon

chapter, we looked at the progression of psychoanalytic theory and how the clinician's role in the therapeutic encounter has evolved. This transition has provided the clinician with more choices regarding disclosure and active participation. By having this option, clinicians can now choose to share parts of their own subjective experience of the session therefore accounting for their own subjectivity and not ignoring it.

### *Cultural Studies and the Phenomenon*

Cultural studies is a critical analysis of culture (Grossberg, 2006). In the cultural studies chapter this author provided a brief literature review on the writings of this field in regards to racial discourse. Because this chapter has already examined this theory as related to race, we will now focus our attention on its application to the phenomenon, the multiracial individual in the clinical setting.

When conceptualizing the multiracial identity, this writer wondered how a person begins to formulate such an identity. In the study of cultural studies, it can be said that this identity is an articulation of racial discourse. Racial discourse is articulated on all levels of society: micro and macro. At a macro level, racial discourse is articulated through culture.

According to Hall (1996), culture also has a mutual influence on discourse by constructing it and directing it. In the cultural studies chapter, we looked at the work of Stuart Hall and his summation of the change in discourse over time regarding identity. Hall described the concepts of identity as moving through the enlightenment subject, the sociological subject, and now most currently to the post-modern subject. This macro level progression of knowledge had a mezzo level influence. This transition in knowledge influenced a change in cultural values regarding what are acceptable

behaviors, values and norms. If we think back to the phenomenon chapter, we can see that historically the mezzo level effect of this progression is demonstrated by the institutional and political changes that have occurred over the last 100 years as evidenced in policy. At a micro level, this articulation of racial discourse occurs in the creation of the racial identity (Hall, 1996). In our society, people are racialized, and then using culture, are taught to tie themselves to this identity due to its connection to other cultural values such as heritage and family.

Slowly, over-time race has transitioned from being understood as an innate biological trait to a socially constructed identity that is part of a larger system of race and racism (Shih & Sanchez, 2009). More recently, we can see a small transition towards the post-modern understanding of identity (Hall, 1996) in regards to a slight increase in the integration of the biracial and multiracial identity into racial discourse as evidenced by the change in the Census categories. By beginning to incorporate these identities into the discourse, it is becoming possible for individuals to hold more than one race not based on any innate deterministic characteristics. We appear to be at a point in which the conjuncture of racial identity is in flux between the values and traditions of identity and the move towards a more post-modern way of addressing identity. This conjuncture is of course not only horizontal in nature, but also vertical in that there are layers of meanings that stem from history that are transitioning at a completely different rate and will likely bring light to new contradictions over time.

In light of this understanding of the transitioning nature of racial discourse and the details of its articulation, this writer's attention now turns back to the individual, and how these dynamics may surface in the clinical setting. If we return to the case study, we can

see that throughout my life there have been multiple transition points regarding my perception of my racial identity. When considering these points in relation to the progression towards post-modern thinking, it is tempting to accredit this progression as the root of the struggle I experienced between the systems of classification in which I lived. Although race is valued in Hawaii, the classification system of inclusion and exclusion has seemed to move beyond the use of racial labels. The concept of being “local” is informative in that the inclusion and exclusion factors are based on culture, as well as on race. Although inclusion to being local is defined by culture, and exclusion usually defined by whiteness, inclusion into the culture is periodically granted to those that are white. This system still serves the purpose of creating difference and power dynamics, yet I still have chosen to use this system of classification due to feeling that there is not an appropriate option for me at this time.

Gilroy’s work (2000) supports not using racial identities, due to his perception that race is not separate from racism and that by continuing to use the existing language one will inevitably be participating and perpetuating the system through the enforcement of difference. The system of power sustained by difference is the system that limits individuals’ agency. As discussed in the cultural studies chapter, agency is influenced by the location of an individual in the spatial system of power. If we look back at the case study, I discussed my feelings regarding my access to social situations in Hawaii. Based on my racial location as a half-white person, in the specific culture of Hawaii, I was not allowed full access to certain cultural events. By access, I’m referring to not only physical access, but also access to the knowledge, access to the right to participate, and access to the right to be equally valued as a person.

### *Core Principles and Practice Considerations When Working With Multiracial Individual*

Based on this examination of intersubjectivity theory and of cultural studies, I have conceptualized a framework for use by clinicians in their work with multiracial individuals. This approach is grounded in the clinical dynamics of intersubjectivity theory while addressing issues of racial identity with an intense focus on the historical and political ramifications of the articulation of racial discourse on the individual. This approach consists of a set of core principles and practice considerations which are best accounted for when working with a multiracial individual.

#### *Core Principles*

1. Individuals in the United States are racialized, whether or not they choose to self-identify racially.
2. Everyone constructs their own subjective interpretation of what race is, what it is for, how it works in society and who they are in relation to this.
3. Perspectival realism: we all only hold a piece of reality.
4. Even if some racial stories are similar, the meaning taken from them may be completely different.
5. An individual may hold more than one racial identity and this may, or may not, be accepted by their culture.
6. Racial identity is an articulation of the larger racial discourse and is not always the norm by which people identify themselves.
7. When racialized, an individual's sense of agency may be impacted depending on the intersections of their identities and where this locates them amongst the many power structures of the society.

8. Difference is always established within a hierarchy of power.
9. The dominant white group has historically existed in opposition to the “other”.  
This means that the dominant group members never have to define themselves, while the subordinate group members continuously justify themselves.
10. The multiracial identity is conflictual by nature and there is no existing standard for how an individual is to deal with this.
11. Hybridity or multiracialism is a threat to the current racial system because it draws attention to the flawed definitions of racial categories.
12. Racial categories alone may be reifying the existing power structures inherent in racial discourse.

#### *Practice Considerations*

1. Clinical work is ideally performed within an intersubjective context.
2. The personal subjectivities of both client and clinician are present whether this is acknowledged or not.
3. Experiences of affective attunement are held in the prereflective unconscious. The unconscious is not static, but is fluid and continuously developing in the face of new experiences.
4. Effective therapy takes place within an established empathic alliance.
5. Exploring the client’s racial identity may threaten existing organizational understandings and/or important ties and therefore must be approached with empathy, caution and clear intention by the therapist.



These practice considerations are most likely not exhaustive, nor are they invincible to time. They are proposed to be used as a basic set of considerations, which may be used by clinicians when working with the multiracial individual. These principles and considerations are an attempt at bridging the gap between clinical and sociopolitical approaches. Racial identity cannot be seen separate from development, nor can it be seen as separate from this country's sociopolitical history. This author feels that it is important to not only incorporate the history of race, but a larger understanding of how racial discourse is articulated in society to clinical practice. It is within these articulations that individual meaning is created.

### *Conclusion*

This theoretical study has addressed the phenomenon of working with multiracial individuals in the clinical setting. Through intersubjectivity theory and the writings of cultural studies the phenomenon was explored. Concepts from both theories were applied to the case study. As a result of this theoretical study, core principles and practice considerations when working with the multiracial individual were proposed.

From here, it is hoped that more research on racial dynamics in the clinical setting will be done, specifically regarding the biracial and multiracial identities. The fields of social work, psychology, and psychiatry would greatly benefit from more qualitative studies exploring the nuances of racial identity. The clinical fields of this country serve a hugely diverse population. Clinicians must continue to challenge themselves to be conscientious of the limits of their experiences and existing theories if we are to work effectively with the multiracial population.

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