2010

# An exploration of the social construction of race and racial identity : a project based upon an independent investigation

Elizabeth Castrellon
*Smith College*

## Recommended Citation

Elizabeth Castrellón
An Exploration of the Social
Construction of Race and
Racial Identity

ABSTRACT

This theoretical study explored the social construction of race and racial identity through the lens of Queer Theory and Narrative Theory. Although the concept of race is understood as a social construct, research literature shows that this concept is complex and that there are many factors that contribute to the social construction of race in a way that has real life consequences for people.  The use of Queer Theory and Narrative Theory to examine this social construct provides a broader base of understanding for clinical applications. The researcher provides recommendations for social workers in their work with diverse populations.

AN EXPLORATION OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE AND RACIAL

IDENTITY

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

Elizabeth Castrellón

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, MA 01063

2010

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my family, particularly my mother and sister, for their love and support throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Narviar Barker Calloway for her guidance, patience, and support. To the many friends I now have all across the country; thank you for your kindness and for believing in me. To my extended Smith family, this process was worth it because of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> We do not usually think that there is anything wrong with the ways in which
> people are sorted into races—that is, with the criteria for membership in different
> races—because we think that what race a person belongs to is obvious from
> looking at him or her. We do not question the naturalness of racial differences or
> the very existence of races. We go on about our business as though there always
> have been human races and there always will be human races. (Zack, 1998, p. 1)

The intent of this theoretical thesis is to explore the social construction of race and racial identity and to examine how social work practice contributes to this social construction. For purposes of this theoretical study, the researcher draws heavily upon Helms's (1995) literature search that defined race as a sociopolitical construction that is not biologically inherent. To this definition of race, the current researcher also adds behavior as a social construction of race; an individual's behavior is impacted by the construction of race currently in place, and at the same time behavior solidifies the current construction of race.

This study is important because social workers must be aware of how their attitudes and behaviors towards race and racial identity affect their interactions with the clients they serve. The Preamble of the Code of Ethics (2008) set by the National Association of Social Workers calls for social workers to be "sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice." The profession of social work clearly calls for a commitment to diversity.

1

Our society often defines race as the color of one's skin, physical features, and or physical agile. However historically within the United States, race and racial identity can be recognized as a fluid and changing phenomenon. By example, the U.S. Census validates these changes throughout history. The 2010 U.S Census lists 14 different racial categories in addition to the option to check more than one box and to fill in one's self designated race (U.S Census Bureau, 2010); however in 1970, the U.S. Census asked for "color or race" and listed only 8 categories including the option to fill in one's self designated race (Lee, 1993).

This researcher's review of the literature shows that many researchers have explored the concept of racial identity, yet the literature on this subject shows that there are many definitions for racial identity. The lack of consistency amongst researchers regarding a definition of racial identity is a reflection of its complexity. Existing racial identity development models attempt to capture the stages that a person of color may go through in order to maintain a positive self-image in a racist society. When thinking about racial identity, one must take into consideration not only the categories available to him or her, but also the process that one goes through in order to self identity with a particular category.

Racial identity theory has defined race as a sociopolitical construction in which racial groups are not biologically distinct; and these racial groups experience "different conditions of domination or oppression" (Helms, 1995, p. 181). The most common models of racial identity have focused on the experience of African Americans, although these models can be applied and have been applied to the experience of other individuals of color in the United States. Racial identity has often been thought about in terms of

self-identification; however, models of racial identity development for bi-racial and multi-racial individuals have pointed out that there can be differences between an individual's self-identification, other's perception of that individual's racial identity, and the racial categories available at that moment in history for that individual to choose as an identity (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009).

Understanding racial identity becomes even more complex when one takes into consideration the concept of ethnic identity, which at times is used interchangeably with racial identity. Researchers also are inconsistent with the definitions of ethnicity. Smedley and Smedley (2005) stated, "ethnicity refers to clusters of people who have common culture traits that they distinguish from those of other people" (p. 17) while Zack (1998) defined ethnicity as "human cultural traits as learned behavior; the combination of learned cultural behavior with a specific ancestry and physical appearance" (p.113).

The current researcher conceptualizes this theoretical thesis from the standpoint that race and racial identity are social constructs that have social, economic, and political implications for individuals living in the United States. Taylor (1997) pointed out that the predominant view in the social sciences is that race is socially constructed through political, economic, and scientific institutions, which is consistent with the conceptualization of this theoretical thesis. This researcher also works from the premise that there is no healthy or unhealthy racial identity development, just different constructions of racial identity. This is consistent with the work of Samuels (2009) who argued against theorizing any identity as inherently pathological or healthy. This researcher also notes that although race and racial identity are social constructs, they

transcend all aspects of society, making it a reality for all individuals, either because they are labeled as "other" or because they are awarded unearned privilege.

Two theories frame this theoretical study: (1) Queer Theory and (2) Narrative Theory. These theories formulate the construction of identity, and are useful in broadening the complexities in understanding racial identity.

Queer Theory emerged as a critique of both Feminist and Gay and Lesbian theories (Fineman, 2009). Fineman discussed Queer Theory's criticism of Feminist Theory that views feminism as working from existing identities and social structures, which in turn limit the potential for radical change. Queer Theory seeks to deconstruct social conventions, and it targets and critiques the concept of identity (Ford 2007).

Narrative Theory stems from the field of humanities, although more recently through the work of White and Epson (1990) and White (2007), has been applied to clinical interactions through the development of Narrative Therapy. Rudd (2007) argued that one's sense of self is tied up with the ability to tell a coherent story about oneself, and that "narrativity" plays a central role in one's thinking about personal identity.

The following chapters add clarity and specificity to understanding the interrelatedness between the social construction of race and racial identity and examine how this construction affects the attitudes and behaviors of social workers using Queer Theory and Narrative Theory as the researcher's theoretical frame. Chapter 2 provides methodology. Chapter 3 reviews current and historical literature on race and racial identity. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 explore Queer and Narrative Theories, respectively; and Chapter 6 draws upon Queer Theory and Narrative Theory to examine the attitudes and behaviors of social workers and their clients towards race and racial identity.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This theoretical thesis explores the social construction of race and the process by which individuals construct a racial identity for themselves. This researcher also explores the attitudes and behaviors of clients and social workers as it relates to social work practice, and how these attitudes and behaviors contribute to the current construction of race and racial identity. The researcher aims to answer the following questions: 1) How can Queer Theory and Narrative Theory be used to broaden our understanding of racial identity? and 2) How can Queer Theory and Narrative Theory be used to inform one's understanding of the behaviors and attitudes of clients and social workers towards racial identity as it pertains to social work practice? This chapter will briefly introduce the current researcher's conceptualization of race and racial identity, discuss the rationale behind using these two theories to further understand race and racial identity, and discuss the strengths and limitations of this theoretical study.

This theoretical study approaches the concept of race as a social construct and draws upon the review of research presented by Helms (1995) of race as a sociopolitical construct that is not biologically inherent. Although from an academic and theoretical perspective, several disciplines now recognize race as a social construct, researchers have shown that individuals tend to view race as a biological innate characteristic, and one example of this is the work of Sanders and Akbar (2003). This is not unexpected seeing

that race is a concept that transcends all aspects of society: medicine, government, economics, politics, etc.

One example of this biological construction is the approval in 2005 by the Federal Drug Administration for BiDil, the first drug intended for one racial group, African Americans (Saul, 2005). Racialized science has had a recent resurgence, particularly after studies on human genome have expanded (Crow, 2002 as cited in Smedley & Smedley, 2005). This example serves as an illustration of how race is constructed in our society in a way that has concrete effects.

This researcher is interested in exploring the experience of individuals with regards to racial identity. How is it that individuals construct a racial identity for themselves? What are some of the conflicts that may be experienced through this construction?

Previous work done by researchers in the area of racial identity development discusses the process by which individuals come to identify with a particular group. Miller and Garran (2008) pointed out that racial identity models for individuals labeled people of color in the United States versus racial identity models for individuals labeled as white differ in that the models for people of color focus on developing a positive self image while belonging to an oppressed group; and models for white individuals focus on having individuals accept privilege and develop a positive self image while developing a non racist mentality. These existing models point to internal conflict in the idea of racial identity, that although belonging to a group can be empowering and comforting at times, it can also be discerning when the group that one belongs to is viewed in a negative light.

Researchers have shown that this conflict is particularly complex for individuals labeled as mixed race in the United States (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) argued that there is a need to differentiate between racial identity (an individual's self view), racial identification (how others understand and categorize an individual and racial category), and the racial categories available to choose in specific context. Although Rockquemore et al. (2009) applied this model to mixed race individuals, this researcher proposes that these three concepts need to be considered for *all* individuals when thinking about racial identity, and that identity is constructed by the interaction of these three concepts.

There are practical implications for social workers with regards to racial identity. The attitudes and behaviors towards race and racial identity held by both clients and social workers affect interactions between clients and social workers. Beyond individual attitudes and behaviors, social work as a field contributes to the construction of race in the United States. Research often translates into practice; social workers take findings and apply these findings to policies and practices in order to attempt to better serve their clients. A hypothetical example of this integration would be a research study that focuses on social inequalities between two racial groups in the United States. Although this type of research is important because it allows for the dissemination of knowledge about the effects of racism, it continues to deconstruct race as separate and concrete categories rather than as a fluid and changing phenomenon. As Rockquemore et al. (2009) pointed out; the concepts of racial identity and racial identity development exist within a racist framework. Therefore, in the opinion of this researcher the concept of racial identity is a

complex phenomenon for the field of social work, and it is important for social workers to understand how this concept is used in the profession of social work and its effects on interactions with clients in social work practice.

This researcher has chosen two theories, Queer Theory and Narrative Theory, to examine the social construction of race. Both of these theories look at the social construction of identity, and at how individuals construct and form identities for themselves. Because these theories look at the social construction of identity, this researcher believes that they are useful in broadening the current understanding of racial identity.

According to Ford (2007), Queer Theory radically attacks the concept of identity. Scholars working from this lens have focused on gender and sexual identities; Queer Theory suggests that gender is a socially constructed concept that has no biological or psychological precursor or reality (McKenzie 2010). This theory draws heavily from the works of Michael Foucault and Judith Butler, although many other scholars have contributed to this field.

Butler (1999, 2000) discussed the concept of performativity; this concept refers to idea that individuals learn to perform gender, and that they construct an identity through this performance. There is no inherent identity under this performance, and individuals cannot simply choose to stop this performance, as society as a whole constructs the concept of gender through acts of repetition (Butler, 2000).

As Schneiderman (2010) pointed out, Judith Butler through her work has shown a preoccupation with the categories of identity that is available. This researcher understands the idea of a discrepancy between identity and categories of identity

available as integral to the understanding of racial identity. Just as Butler is preoccupied with the categories that are available for identity in terms of gender and sexuality, this researcher finds the categories available for racial identity as limiting.  In the opinion of the current researcher, the concept of performativity is also helpful in the understanding of racial identity in relation to how individuals construct identity.

Narrative Theory also deals with the construction of identity.  Narrative theory has its roots in the humanities although through the work of Michael White in Narrative Therapy, Narrative Theory has found itself in the clinical social work realm.  White (2007) stated:

> As noted earlier, many of the people who seek therapy believe that the problems in their lives are a reflection of their own identity or the identity of others.  When this is the case, their efforts to resolves problems usually have the effect of exacerbating them instead.  This leads people to solidly believe that the problems of their lives area reflection of certain "truths" about their nature, or about the nature and character of others—that these problems are internal to their self or the selves of others. (p. 25).

The concept of identity is central in Narrative Therapy, and as Rudd (2007) argued, individuals' sense of self-identity is tied to people's ability to tell a coherent story about her or his own self.  What are the stories that individuals receive about the racial category they are assigned?  How do these stories affect how an individual view him or herself?  What happens when the narratives around her or him do not validate a person's sense of self?  In the opinion of this researcher, Narrative Theory can be helpful in broadening the understanding of racial identity.

This researcher uses these two theories to analyze the process by which individuals construct a racial identity for themselves.  Specifically, this researcher looks at the three concepts outlined by Rockquemore et al. (2009), racial identity, racial

identification, and racial categories, through the lens of Queer Theory and Narrative Theory to broaden the understanding of the construction of racial identity. This researcher uses these two theories to further expand the understanding of racial identity as it pertains to the field of social work, and the attitudes and behaviors of social workers towards their clients.

Although this theoretical study enriches the current understanding of racial identity and its impact on the field of social work, the researcher acknowledges that there are limitations to this theoretical study. This study draws on existing literature to broaden the understanding of racial identity and its effects on the field of social work; and although the use of literature to expand current understanding is important, a more complete perspective might be obtained by gathering data versus examining literature.

This researcher also acknowledges that there were potential biases that may have affected this theoretical study. This researcher's personal experience as a self-identified woman of color living in the United States as well as her previous academic experience in the study of race and racial identity are possible factors that may have influenced the framing of this theoretical study.

The following chapters continue to expand the understanding of racial identity and discuss how it pertains to social workers in their practice. Chapter 3 reviews current and historical literature on race and racial identity. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 explore Queer and Narrative Theories, respectively; and Chapter 6 draws upon Queer Theory and Narrative Theory to examine the attitudes and behaviors of social workers and their clients towards race and racial identity, and examines how social work practice contributes to the social construction of race.

CHAPTER III

THE PHENOMENON

Race is a phenomenon that transcends all aspects of society in the United States. As Smedley and Smedley (2005) stated, race is so deeply embedded into the social structure and customs of humans, that it is impossible to escape the process of racialization. In order to understand the transcendental nature of this phenomenon, it is important to consider that the concept of race has not always existed, and that even within its current existence, there are wide ranges of views on the meaning of this concept.

The dominant perspective in the social sciences views race as socially constructed through political, economic, and scientific institutions (Taylor1997). Race is constructed at an academic level, where scholars in a variety of fields through their research postulate the construction of race. Race also is constructed on a practical level in which the behaviors of individuals in society, including social work practitioners, contribute to the construction of race. Likewise, behaviors are a reflection of the current construction. In this chapter the researcher reviews existing literature on the social construction of race with focus on historical and current attitudes on race and racial identity.

*Historical Attitudes*

The construction of race is a multi-layered and complicated process. In order to gain an understanding of the complexities of the concepts of race and racial identity in the United States, history must be reviewed.

Researchers have shown that the concept of race has not always existed. The use of this word has been widely studied, and researchers have looked at the origins of this term to identify and explore the time period and context in which it began to arise (Miramon, 2009; Smedley, 1999). According to Miramon (2009), Jacques de Brézé first mentioned the term race at the end of the fifteenth century in a poem in reference to hunting dogs. Miramon (2009) pointed out that the use of this term was a reflection of changing ideas about heredity during the fourteenth century. Miramon (2009) explored the shift from using race in referring to heredity in hunting dogs to the use of the term in referring to heredity in human beings, specifically the concept of "heredity blood". Miramon (2009) stated that although the concepts of race and heredity blood in their early use were not racist since they were not used for the self-justification of nobility, they were a part of the cultural and political evolutions that explained the birth of race. Consistent with this work is the work of Smedley (1993) who argued "the term race made possible an easy analogy of inheritable and unchangeable features from breeding animals to human beings" (as cited in Taylor, 1997).

Smedley and Smedley (2005) pointed out that *"race* was a folk idea in the English language; it was a general categorizing term, similar to and interchangeable with such terms as *type, kind, sort, breed,* and even *species"*(p. 19). The use of this concept continued to change, and by the end of the Revolutionary era, the term race was widely used as a reference for social categories of Indians, Blacks and whites (Smedley, 1999). Taylor (1997) stated that skin color and other physical traits were developed into a system for classifying human populations into categories that have in turn been organized into a hierarchy of implied worth. However, previous to the application of the concept of

12

race to human beings, individuals with different physiological characteristics, specifically

Europeans and individuals of African descent, interacted with each other without

particular social meaning attached to their physical characteristics (Smedley & Smedley,

2005).

In the United States, the history of slavery has been the cornerstone for the

construction of race.  In order for slave owners to justify the institution of slavery,

individuals of African American descent had to be constructed as having sub human

characteristics, and many held the view that humans of African descent were created

separately from other "more" human beings (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).  As a result, in

the United States "the single most important criterion of status was, and remains, the

racial distinction between Black and White" (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p.20).  The

history of immigration shows that certain European immigrants were assigned to a low

social status and were constructed as having an "ethnicity" that had to be eliminated in

order for assimilation to take place. Ethnicity was seen as plastic and transmissible, but

race represented differences that could not be transcended (Smedley & Smedley 2005).

The phenomenon known as the "one drop rule" has served as a way for society, and

government, to categorize individuals as Black if they have known African ancestors

(Degler, 1971 as cited in Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

Categorizing individuals has been a key method for constructing race in the

United States.  Although censuses can provide valuable demographic information, they

also are a way to categorize individuals.  As Michael Armacost (2000) pointed out,

"when the U.S. Constitution instructed slaves to be counted as three-fifths of a person,

the census has been caught up in the nation's racial dilemmas" (p. vii).

The census has provided validity to the concept of race in the United States. By looking at the changes in the racial categories available throughout the history of the census it is possible to track inconsistencies in the use of this term. Lee (1993) tracked and analyzed changes in the censuses of the United States from 1890 to 1990; her analysis shows the U.S. population has been separated into two mutually exclusive categories based on skin color, whites and others. This is consistent with Smedley and Smedley's (2005) statement that status in the United States is formed around the distinction between Black and white. Lee (1993) pointed out that in the past it was assumed that enumerators could assign individuals to one of the races by mere observation. She argued that census racial classifications reflected the tension towards the categorization of people into single races, which in turn pushes individuals of mixed racial backgrounds to have to make a choice. Lee (1993) also pointed out that the census has minimized ethnic differences and constructed pan ethnic groups such as whites and Asian Americans.

A census is a reflection of societal attitudes towards race during specific periods in time; however, it is also important to recognize that the census reinforces the concept of race by providing validity to racial categories as defined by the normalization of "white". The United States Office of Management and Budget manages the U.S. Census, which is an example of how government and policy play a role in the social construction of race.

Science is another institution that has contributed to the construction of race. Researchers have explored the history of racialized science and the impact that this has had on the current understanding of what race is (Smedley, 1999; Smedley & Smedley,

2005).  Smedley (1999) pointed out that from the 19th century forward, science has seen

the concept race as subdivisions of the human species that differ from one another

phenotypically, due to ancestral geographic origins, or differences in the frequency of

certain genes.  Smedley and Smedley (2005) stated "since the 1790s and well into the

20th century, the role of science has been to confirm and authenticate the folk beliefs

about human differences expressed in the idea of race by examining the bodies of

different people in each racial category."  Scientists attempted to quantify differences by

measuring heads and other parts of the human body (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).  The

idea of the inequality of races and the idea of distinctive behaviors exhibited by each

racial group were taken as a reality and were part of scientific discourse at the end of the

nineteenth century (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

The intersection of racism and science research has had a tremendous impact on

the lives of individuals constructed as non-white.  The Holocaust provides one example

of this intersection; during World War II scientists looked at phenotypical differences,

including nose widths, and used these perceived differences to justify genocide.   In the

United States, scientists hired by the U.S. government in Tuskegee, Alabama withheld

medical treatment from African American men and used the scientific experimentation to

justify unjust actions.

*Current Attitudes*

The American Anthropological Association has an ongoing public education

project named RACE: Are we so different?  This program strives to convey three

messages 1) That race is a recent human invention 2) race is about culture not biology

and 3) race and racism are embedded in institutions and everyday life. This public education project reflects a shift in current attitudes about race, and the attempts to deconstruct the current concept of race.

Taylor (1997) pointed out that the predominant view on race in the social sciences is that race is a social construct.   Researchers from different academic fields have attempted to deconstruct the concept of race and studied how this social construction comes about.

However, this researcher notes that race continues to be a concept that transcends all aspects of society.  The impact that race and racism have had on society has not been eliminated.  This is apparent when one looks at social inequalities that exist between and by looking at the attitudes that continue to construct race as "real".  As Todorov (2000) stated: "scientists may or may not believe in 'race' but their position has no influence on the perception of the man in the street, who can see perfectly well that the difference exist" (p. 65).

There are many examples of how researchers continue to contribute to the social construction of race. This researcher explores three contemporary examples that portray the complexity of the construction race, and its detrimental effects.  First, the attitudes in the U.S Census will be explored.  Second, an example from the field of psychology, and the attempt of researchers to look at ethnic differences in intelligence will be discussed. The third example is from the field of medicine, where racial differences are constructed as significant enough to warrant a separate medical intervention for one specific group.

The U.S Census continues to attempt to gather information about ethnicity and race.  However, changes have been made to how this information is viewed and gathered.

The Office of Management and Budget has stated that the racial and ethnic classifications in the census should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature (Directive No. 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting, 1978 as cited in Skerry, 2000). Skerry (2000) pointed out that the census uses the Office of Management and Budget's established categories are categories in which individuals placed themselves; no federal agency establishes categories and now the census relies on self-identification. This reflects the attitude that individuals should categorize themselves, and that government should not play a role in this process.

Skerry (2000) further discussed the concept of self-identification, and pointed out that "self-identification of race and ethnicity is hardly inviolate" (p. 49). Skerry (2000) provided examples of when census enumerators make judgments about race and ethnicity, including when attempting to count homeless individuals who are unwilling to participate, and when households have failed to return their questionnaires and no one in the household is available when census enumerators attempt to contact the family; "the enumerator might well impute answers on the basis of information gathering from inspection of the dwelling and of neighboring households" (p. 49).

Although the ideal of self-identification appears to be an attitude shift in the concept of race, as Skerry (2000) pointed out, the reality is at times different, and individuals continue to be labeled by the government. One must also take into consideration that although individuals self-identify into these categories, these categories have their beginnings in a historically racist system where these categories were made, not by individuals choosing to place themselves into these categories, but by institutions.

Racialized science has constructed, and continues to construct, non-white racial groups as less than. In 1994 Herrnstein and Murray, the authors of *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* dedicated several chapters of their book to what they presented as evidence of ethnic differences in intelligence ability. The authors stated that "ethnic difference in cognitive ability are neither surprising nor in doubt". They looked at literature that presents findings about these differences, and the trends that they found are 1) Chinese and Japanese individuals tend to score higher on intelligence and achievement tests than whites, and 2) whites tend to score higher than African Americans. The authors refuted arguments that socioeconomic differences explain these differences in test results, and concluded that although the argument about genetic differences versus environmental factors has not been resolved, it is important to acknowledge that these differences exist in order to form a more equitable America.

Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) book is an example of how race continues to be constructed as a concrete identifiable difference between groups. It is important to note that the authors did not use the word race, and instead used the word "ethnic" because they considered the word race a difficult concept to employ in the American context, and pointed to the difficulties that the term race presents. They solved this problem by choosing to focus on self-identification, and conversely coin this ethnicity instead of race.

> "The rule we follow here is to classify a person according to the way they classify themselves. The studies of 'blacks' or 'Latinos' or 'Asians' who live in America generally denote people who *say* they are black, Latino, or Asian—no more, no less (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994, p. 271).

The concept of self-identification is present in their argument. However, the arguments presented by these authors serve as a way to reinforce the idea that there is

something concrete and tangible about racial categories. Their use of the concept of self-identification is contradictory to their argument that genetics cannot be discarded as a possibility because the roles of genetics and environmental factors have not been identified. In the opinion of this researcher the message here is clear: race exists, and not only does race exist, but there is a core *identity* related to race that individuals must be aware of if they are able to self identify based on potential genetic differences.

In 2005, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approved BiDil, a medication for the treatment of heart failure and the first drug intended for the use of one racial group, African Americans (Saul, 2005). BiDil is an example of how medicine continues to contribute to the social construction of race. By targeting this drug specifically for African Americans, the field of medicine has provided validity to the idea that a racial category named African American exists. The intention of this researcher is not to argue against the potential benefits of this drug, but to highlight how the current presentation of this drug reinforces attitudes about race and racial differences.

It is important to note the different institutions that played a role in this scenario. Researchers conceptualized their findings in a certain way, a governmental institution, the FDA approved the drug, and the media has disseminated information about this drug through advertisement. BiDil is an example of how institutions validate the existence of race and racial categories.

*Social Construction of Racial Identity*

Ideas about identity and race have intersected to form the concept of racial identity. Race often has been identified as the color of one's skin, physical features, and

or physical agile, and racial categorizations have been formed from grouping together individuals with similar physical characteristics. The use of color to prescribe racial identity implies a racist perspective, and often leads to unequal treatment and disingenuous behaviors.  Researchers are not consistent in their definition of racial identity, although most theories or models conceptualize racial identity as one's identification with a particular group (Reynolds & Baluch, 2001). There are several models that speak to racial identity development. Some models are based on typologies while others use a linear development or stage/status perspective; however most models examine individual attitudes toward one's own racial group and the racial groups of others (Reynolds & Baluch, 2001).

The development of racial identity models is both positive and negative.  On the one hand such models create empowerment and acceptance; but on the other hand, these models maintain divisiveness and racism. As Rockquemore et al. (2009) pointed out, the concepts of racial identity and racial identity development exist within a racist system, therefore making them problematic.

Miller and Garran (2008) stated, "we all have identity, a sense of who we are in relation to other people" (p. 104).  Racial identity and ethnic identity theory provide a window for understanding individual and collective identity.  As theorists have attempted to understand how people of color develop a "positive and adaptive sense of identity" when living in a racist society, emphasis has shifted from biological terms to social construction, how an individual's racial identity changes over time (Miller & Garran, 2008).  Ethnic and racial identity theories identify stages or phases that a person moves through in their racial identity development (Miller & Garran, 2008).   Traditionally the

same racial identity theories were applied to both whites and people of color; however in recent years researchers have come to understand that distinctions exist between whites and people of color when examining racial identity. Most salient is the fact that people of color have to work to internalize a positive self-image while whites must work on developing a non-racist white identity (Miller & Garran, 2008).

Although racial identity development is described as an internal process for individuals (Miller & Garran, 2008), literature on this topic also points to external factors that complicate racial identity (Wilson, 2009; Tehranian, 2008; Omi, 2008). As Wilson (2009) observed, the complexity of racial identity is often downplayed in the media. Individuals are given labels that may not fit the way they self identify, which can be particularly problematic for mixed raced individuals (Wilson, 2009). When researchers interviewed a sample of students with one white and one Black parent, they found that over sixty percent of students described their racial identity as a blending of white and Black identities, a hybrid or third space (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). However, within this group some individuals had their racial identity validated by others in their social environment while others did not (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). For example, some of the students surveyed identified as Biracial yet they were perceived as Black (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). Disparities exist between the racial categories that individuals choose to identity with, and the categories to which they are assigned by society.

Some scholars have pointed out that developing a racial identity theory for mixed race individuals has been problematic (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Mixed race identity development theory is fragmented and inconsistent and like other

theories is limited by its existence within a racial ideology (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado 2009). Rockquemore et al. (2009) suggested that when studying race, researchers should differentiate between three terms: (1) racial identity, or an individual's self-understanding; (2) racial identification, or how others understand and categorize an individual; and (3) racial category, or what racial identities are available and chosen in a specific context.

Mixed raced individuals are not the only people for which the concept of racial identity is problematic. Americans of Middle Eastern descent face a unique situation. Due to the war on terrorism, racial profiling, and targeted immigration policies, they have faced increasing discrimination; yet "on paper" they are classified as white in the United States (Tehranian, 2008). For example, Middle Eastern representation is often not taken into consideration when considering issues of diversity in higher education (Tehranian, 2008). The racial identity of white is assigned to a group whose culture is different than the culture in the United States.

For individuals categorized as Asian Americans, racial identity is also a complex issue. Asian Americans are increasingly being perceived as white due to patterns of assimilation, including rates of intermarriage with whites and economic prosperity (Omi, 2008). According to Omi, Asian Americans are often not perceived as underrepresented or disadvantaged (2008). However, these perceptions can be misleading especially when considering the amount of diversity that exists within the socially constructed group called Asian Americans (Omi, 2008). At the same time that they are increasingly being perceived as white, Asian Americans continue to be perceived as "perpetual foreigners" (Omi, 2008); this creates a complex and difficult situation for Asian Americans.

The concept of race indeed is complex, and although scholars point out that race is a social construct, this is not necessarily how individuals understand their own racial identity (Sanders & Akbar, 2003). When African American individuals were interviewed about their views on how people are assigned to racial groups, 45.9% responded that they thought of racial categories as defined by biological and physical characteristics (Sanders & Akbar, 2003). Although academically race is recognized as a social construct, only 2.5% of participants in Sanders & Akbar's study questioned the existence of race.

There are strong critiques of racial identity development models (O'Donnell, 2002). For example, one researcher found that high school students and undergraduate students frame problems in similar ways when asked to analyze a racial incident (O'Donnell, 2002). According to O'Donnell, racial identity development models do not explain why students of different ages have similar understandings of race since older students are presumed to operate at a higher cognitive maturation level (2002). He argues that racial identity development models are not the most useful tools in pedagogy because they do not reflect the current society in which students live (O'Donnell, 2002).

The concept of developing a non-racist white identity may prove more complex than current models portray. Although the term "white racial identity" has been used to describe the development of a non-racist white racial identity, some researchers have pointed out some of the contradictions with this particular usage of the term (Croll, 2007). Croll (2007) in his study found that individuals who believed that America should be a white nation were also more likely than other white individuals to say that their white racial identity was important to them. The term white racial identity means

different things to different people; and like any other group, whites are a diverse group (Croll, 2007).

The use of the terms racist and non-racist have also been challenged (Trepagnier, 2001). One scholar argues that these terms do not have much weight because people see and describe themselves as non-racist even if their thoughts and behaviors are often racist in nature (Trepagnier, 2001). Some of focus group participants that took part in a study of the construction of racism had a high level of racial awareness and were able to identify when they were contributing to racism, yet they continued to exhibit these behaviors without meaning to and continued to identify as non-racist (Trepagnier, 2001).

CHAPTER IV

QUEER THEORY

This chapter analyzes the construction of race and racial identity through a Queer

Theory perspective. Queer Theory emerged in the late 1980's as an academic movement

in elite universities (Stein & Plummer, 2004). Queer Theory offers a critique of the fields

of Feminist Theory and Gay and Lesbian studies, conceptualizing these two fields as

working within existing systems, and thus preventing radical change (Fineman, 2009;

Ford, 2007). Queer Theory seeks to deconstruct social norms and institutions, instead of

working within these existing systems, and to radically attack the concept of identity

(Ford, 2007).

This researcher focuses specifically on the work of Judith Butler and her

formulation of the construction of identity and then will apply this view of the

construction of identity to the concepts of race and racial identity.  For a broader

understanding of Queer Theory the reader may look at the works of other influential

writers in the field of Queer Theory that include Michael Foucault, Eve Sedgwick, Teresa

de Lauretis and several others.


*Queer Theory and Identity*

Butler (1999) critiqued Feminist Theory's placement of woman as a

representational figure in political discourse. According to Butler, attempts to gain power

and visibility by putting woman as a representational figure in the political sphere only

recreates that which it seeks to deconstruct (1999). Feminist Theory assumes that there is an existing identity, which is understood through the category of woman. This notion of woman is what has been put forth at the center of discourse. However putting woman at the center of their discourse constructs gender because for woman to be used as a representation, what constitutes a woman must first be defined. According to Butler, (1999) "the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended" (p. 4).

Butler (1999) described the concept of gender identity as existing within the constraints of a masculine/feminine binary system. Feminist theorists have used this concept of an existing gender identity to apply their arguments universally. This conceptualization of gender identity separates woman from class, race, ethnicity, and other factors, which contribute to the experience and identity formation of an individual (Butler, 1999).

Butler's expressed concern was about the notion that gender and sex are two distinct categories, where gender is socially constructed and sex is based on biology (1999). Butler asserted that gender and sex are not separate categories but rather that biological sex is also a construction (1999). Butler (1999) argued that what is constructed as gender is actually sex. This does not mean that gender norms are inherent characteristics, rather that the concept of sex does not exist outside of the concept of gender. Sex does not precede gender and the meaning that is attached to the body is not outside of the construction of gender (Butler 1999).

Butler also expressed concern with the concept of categories and the available categories for people to identify with (Butler, 1999). Gender, sex, and sexuality

categories are based on a binary system, where the expression of individuals is constrained regardless of how many categories are added.

So how is identity constructed according to Butler? Butler (1999) discussed the concept of performativity as the method for the construction of gender identity.

> "Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute reality" (p. 173).

What is viewed as psychological core is nothing but a political and discursive origin of gender identity (Butler 1999). Butler (1999) argued that individuals give the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core through words, acts, and gestures. She used the example of "drag" as an example of gender performativity; this example then became central in discussions of performativity and identity formation. Later, Butler (2000) clarified that not all performativity was to be understood as drag; it is not only clothes that make the woman rather "the practice by which gendering occurs, the embodiment of norms, is compulsory practice, a forcible production…" (p. 110). Gender identity is constructed through the repetition of these practices, and the attempt to reach an ideal that is never quite reached (Butler, 2000).

Attempted adherence to heterosexual gender norms is marked by compulsory performances, which are not chosen by the individual, performativity "…cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice' "(Butler, 2000, p. 112). Yet all are forced to negotiate these norms; an individual never quite reaches the ideal, making the individual anxiously repeat the performance in order to reach this idea (Butler, 2000).

Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech, where the person speaking or

writing cannot control the signifiability of these utterances (Butler 2000). Performatives

tend to include acts, which not only perform an action, but also confer a binding power

on the action performed and performative is one domain in which power acts as discourse

(Butler 2000). According to Butler (2000), "performativity describes this relation of

being implicated in that which one opposes…" (p. 116).

*Queer Theory, Race, and Racial Identity*

One critique of Queer Theory is that it has not fully incorporated issues of race

and ethnicity (Phillips & Stewart, 2008; Sullivan, 2003). However, some researchers

have used Queer Theory to look at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race (e.g.,

see [Rodriguez, (2003); Sullivan, (2003); Ward, (2008)]). These works offer new

perspectives on how the expression of identities varies according to sociopolitical

context, and how the construction of race, gender, sex and sexuality are influenced by

each other, reinforcing that these are not distinct and separate categories. Although this

researcher finds these works important for the exploration of identity, the purpose of the

following discussion is not to look at intersections, but rather to explore how the concepts

delineated by Butler apply to the concepts of race and racial identity.

Racial categories parallel gender and sex categories in that they are also based on

a binary system where "white" is considered normative, and people who do not fit into

that category are places in an "other" category. The main distinction in the U.S has been

between white individuals and individuals of African descent. Chapter 3 showed the

complexity behind these categories. Racial categories have shifted; groups have been

added to the category of white; and many other categories have been constructed for individuals designated as people of color. Butler's critique of gender, sex, and sexuality categories therefore can be applied to racial categories. Racial categories also limit the expression of identity for individuals. Adding categories is problematic because it may deflect attention from the racial binary system already in place by creating an illusion of increased tolerance for diversity, yet these categories only function as a way to continue to recreate the system in place because they reiterate differences based on a norm.

It is interesting to note that racial identity development models, which are considered a tool for individuals to develop a positive self-racial identity, have also continued to expand along with the expansion of racial categories. The first identity development models focused specifically on the experience of African Americans, now many more models exist that attempt to capture the identity development of bi-racial, multiracial individuals, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and whites. These models reflect a process that is important for many people, and are used by helping professionals as a tool to inform their practice instead of resorting to stereotypes (Reynolds & Baluch, 2001). These helping tools construct what they seek to deconstruct, because they reinforce the racist system already in place.

Butler's (1999) deconstructed the concept of biological sex by arguing that sex only has meaning because gender exists, the concept of sex is a social construct just as gender is a social construct. This researcher proposes that the same idea can be applied to the concepts of race and ethnicity. There has been a pull to look at ethnicity as a way to step away from the concept of race. Ethnicity provides a source for looking at culture, another social construction, without attaching it to race. Zack (1998) argued that what

most people think about as race is nothing more than ethnicity.  This statement reflects the complexity and inseparability of these two concepts.  Race exists because ethnicity exists, and ethnicity exists because race exists.

Some researchers have focused on deconstructing the concept of race as biology, while many other researchers have continued to see it as a biological concept. In a sense these arguments are redundant and circular because society continues to attach meaning to the body.  Skin colors, hair, facial features, amongst other body characteristics are assigned meaning; society continues to see difference based on physiology.  Arguing that racial/ethnic characteristics are not biologically transmittable is an argument that exists within a framework that conceptualizes bodies as different, and attempting to separate these differences from the body does not take into account that the body is seen as different because racial/ethnic differences have been constructed. This argument is consistent with the work of Ehlers (2008).

Butler's concept of performativity can also be applied to race.  This researcher does not mean to imply that individuals can simple stop performing race, quite the contrary, performative acts are not something that an individual can chose to dispose of, rather the constrains and norms of society continue to reinforce these norms.

So what does a racial performative act look like? One simple example is the act of filling out a U.S Census form.  Regardless of the category chosen, the act of choosing reinforces the construction of race.  Does the answer to this dilemma consist of simply choosing not to fill out the census?  The answer is not quite so simple; ignoring race is an act of power, a performative act. By not acknowledging the power dynamics that are at play, race continues to be constructed.

Race is constructed in such a way that whiteness has been assigned the status of the "norm". A person categorized as white may not be aware of the category they are assigned to; they may not view themselves as having "race" since society allows for white individuals to develop "normative" identity. The refusal to acknowledge the silence invoked by this lack of acknowledgment is a performative act. Power inhabits this silence; the power to be silent, to be normative, is awarded to individuals assigned to the category of white.

Is it not possible for a person of color to be silent? Can a person of color choose not to fill out their census form? Do not most racial identity development models discuss a pre-encounter stage where a person of color has not acknowledged "difference"? This researcher argues that although this act of silence from a person of color is also a performance, this performative does not have the same of power as if a white person is silent. Silence from a white individual negates the experiences of people of color; silence from a person of color is not true silence because their physical appearance, sociopolitical status, amongst other markers of "other", are perceived by others around them, and they are racialized by the performative act of others around them designating them as "other".

Racial identity development models for white individuals delineate the process by which an individual develops a positive non-racist self-identity while acknowledging their privilege. This non-racist racial identity can also be conceptualized as a performative act; the act of acknowledging race and racism also serves as a way to construct the very system that anti-racism seeks to deconstruct.

After discussing how the concept of performativity applies to white individuals, it appeared logical to this researcher that discussing how performativity applies to people of

color should follow. This moment of perceived logic, the assumption that the logical should be based on the binary, is a performative act. The act of writing this theoretical thesis is in itself a performative act. Throughout this thesis this researcher has discussed white people and people of color; and by writing about these two groups, this researcher is contributing to the creation of these two categories.

The reader should note that this researcher is a self-identified person of color committed to anti-racism work, therefore the act of writing this thesis is an example of how an individual of color constructs race. By writing about the social construction of race, this researcher has placed race at the center of this argument. This researcher's attempt to give representation to oppressed racial groups contributes to the construction of race. Performativity implicates one in what one seeks to oppose (Butler, 1999).

The intent of this researcher is not to conceptualize anti-racism work as a lost battle, impossible to achieve. Rather this conceptualization of race is meant to broaden the current understanding of this social construction and to provide another tool by which to critically analyze race.

CHAPTER V

NARRATIVE THEORY

This chapter analyzes race through a Narrative Theory perspective. The concept of narrative is found across several disciplines including anthropology, philosophy, psychology, and social work. Although Narrative Theory has broad applications that differ depending on the theorist and discipline utilizing this theory, the common theme that is found in all applications is that of meaning making that happens through narratives, or the telling of stories. There is also a temporal component to this theory. Narratives are what links episodes over time in such a way as to make sense of them, (Rudd, 2007).

Narrative Theory has been used to conceptualize identity; theorists have argued that one's sense of self is tied to the capacity to tell a coherent story about oneself (Rudd, 2007). The current researcher reviews aspects of Narrative Theory that focus on the construction of identity, reviews previous applications of Narrative Theory to race and racial identity, and applies Narrative Theory's conceptualization of identity to the construction of race and racial identity.

*Narrative Theory and Identity*

According to Ricoeur (1984) individuals make sense of themselves and their lives through the stories they can tell or not tell about themselves (as cited in Woodruffe-Burton & Elliot, 2005). Therefore, relationships are at the foundation of this

conceptualization of identity; meaning making happens as individuals tell their stories. It is important to note that Ricoeur (1984) also refers to the stories that individuals cannot tell about themselves. Meaning making happens through the telling of stories, and when these stories are not heard, the way that an individual constructs their identity is equally impacted.

Botella and Herrero (2000) argued that identity is both the process and the product of one's self-narrative construction. Identity is synonymous with authorship as one decides what narratives to include or not to include and whose voices one includes or silences when telling one's story (Botella & Herrero, 2000). Identity is conceptualized as fluid; there is never a fixed story, or a final story, a true story, or a single way to tell it (Botella & Herrero, 2000). Identity is constantly changing, and there are multiple identities depending on the context of the narrative (Somers, 1994).

People construct also their identities by placing themselves, or being placed in the context of existing stories (Somers, 1994). Somers (1994) discussed the concepts of social, public, and cultural narratives; which this researcher renames collective narratives in this theoretical thesis. People are guided to act in certain ways based on the multiplicity of narratives available to them (Somers, 1994). Somers (1994) pointed out that ultimately these collective narratives are limited, which implies that there are limits to the identities that individuals can construct for themselves if identity is understood in the context of these collective narratives.

Narrative Therapy, which was developed by Michael White along with David Epson, incorporates elements of Narrative Theory into family therapy, and offers a narrative approach to conceptualizing identity within the therapeutic setting. According

to White (2007), most often when people seek therapy they believe that the problems that they are having are a reflection of their identity or the identity of others, an inherent truth about themselves or others. Individuals internalize negative narratives about themselves, and view external factors as part of their identity. White emphasized the co-construction of new narratives in therapy where the problem is externalized, and no longer held as a part of an individual's identity. Therefore, Narrative Therapy offers a practical application of some of the concepts central to Narrative Theory.

*Narrative Theory, Race, and Racial Identity*

This researcher's literature search did not reflect a significant application of Narrative Theory to the construction of race and racial identity. However, some researchers have looked at race through the lens of Narrative Theory. Winston et al. (2004) conceptualize the identity construction of African American adolescents who have achieved success in math and science, and pointed out the potential conflicts of adolescents who are successful in school and are presented with negative racial stereotypes that do not reflect their success. They argued that Narrative Theory has been underutilized in research on identity, and expressed the need for more research utilizing narrative theories and identity (Winston et al., 2004).

Mattingly (2008) also used Narrative Theory to understand cross race and cross class interactions. She discusses the concept of "narrative mind reading", an individual's capacity to infer the motives that precipitate and underlie the actions of others; this is part of an individual's way of interpreting the meaning of actions as they take place (Mattingly, 2008). Mattingly (2008) pointed out that cross race cross class interactions in

which individuals carry different "scripts" about the other have the potential for misreadings to occur, and "narrative mind reading" becomes part of cultural "othering".

Somers (1994) argued that Narrative Theory offers the potential to step away from the categorical conceptualization of identity; categories do not allow individual experiences to be understood in a to the fullest extent when parts of a person are fragment in the attempt to understand a "specific" identity. Identity is fluid and changing, and narratives and meaning making are present in all aspects of an individual's life. This researcher finds this conceptualization useful, and agrees with the Somers's argument of identity as a multi-layered, complex, and unable to be separated into parts. However, this researcher views Narrative Theory as useful in the conceptualization of race and racial identity because its application highlights the complexities of race and racial identity. Therefore, with the following discussion of Narrative Theory this researcher does not mean to suggest that racial identity is separate from gender, class, sexuality, etc., rather the intent is to broaden the conceptualization the social construction of race.

Racial categories can be conceptualized as what this researcher has named collective narratives. Social, public, and cultural narratives are all narratives that have been built through relationships and the telling of narratives, yet they exist outside of the individual, and are part of a larger group of people. Racial categories have been built in this way, through relationships and the telling of stories. As was discussed in Chapter 3, racial categories continue to be constructed through research, policies, and practices. Media images, existing stereotypes, and everyday life stories also reinforce ideas about race. These collective narratives about race are present, and people make meaning out of their world and of themselves through them, and use them to guide their actions. These

narratives impact the attitudes and behaviors of individual towards each other, and towards themselves. In Narrative Theory, individuals are conceptualized as having authorship; therefore individuals may either chose or not chose to identify as belonging to a particular group. There is agency in this process, as individuals can choose which narratives to include in telling coherent stories about their lives. However, it is important to note that Somers's (1994) pointed out that regardless of the multitude of social, cultural, and public narratives that exist, they are still limited. Racial categories can be conceptualized as limited in the same way, therefore limiting the racial identity that individuals can construct for themselves.

Conceptualized through Narrative Theory racial identity construction is tied to relationships with others, as stories only become narratives when they are told; what happens when other people or greater collective narratives do not validate a person's story? What does that do to a person's ability to tell a coherent story about themselves?

This researcher hypothesizes that there are two ways in which individuals' stories are not validated. The first is when an individual cannot tell his or her story; the second is when collective narratives do not validate an individual's experience.

There are many examples of the silencing of peoples' stories; however a useful example to in this case is that of a racial micro-aggression. A racial micro-aggression happens when an individual makes a subtle racist comment against a person of color. Racial micro-aggressions can be a silencing experience, as the subtleness makes it difficult to decipher the intention of the individual making the comment, and may leave a person questioning whether a "real" racist action happened. Not being able to tell one's story of encounters with racism will shape the way that person is able to tell a coherent

story about them, and construct an identity. The specifics will vary depending on the individual and the situation, however, it is important to note that this is a potential source of conflict in this meaning making process.

The second way that an individual's narrative may not be validated is when greater collective narratives do not validate that individual's views of his/her racial identity. Winston et al. (2004) discussed this issue when applying narrative theory to the experiences of African American adolescents who do well in mathematics and science. Winston et al. (2004) pointed to the reality that certain groups of people are not expected to excel in education, and often negative stereotypes are constructed and reconstructed through images in the media and everyday interactions between individuals. An individuals sense of self, their personal story, may be at odds with the larger scope story about that person's race. Another example of the invalidation of a person's story is when others' perception of what racial group a person belongs to does not concur with that individual's experience of himself or herself. This implies that it may not be enough for an individual to self-identify with a certain group; rather others' perception of that individual may affect his or her self-understanding.

Narrative Theory highlights some of the complexities in the construction of race and racial identity. This theory implies agency in the process of identity construction, however relationships with others are always at the core of identity construction through the telling of narratives.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This researcher explored the social construction of race and racial identity, and showed that this construction is a complex process that has many contributing factors. Although there has been a shift in the way that race is discussed, and the predominant view in the social sciences is that race is a social construct, many of the underlying racist discourses continue to resurface. This researcher then analyzed the concepts of race and racial identity through the lens of Queer Theory and Narrative Theory to offer a broader perspective on how to conceptualize these two concepts.

Queer theory radically attacks the concept of identity, and seeks to deconstruct social norms and institutions (Ford, 2007). Through this lens, this researcher conceptualized race as constructed by individuals existing in a binary system where whiteness and other are the two existing categories. Through performative acts, individuals construct race and a racial identity for themselves. A performative act is an act of authoritative speech that has an impact on the norms surrounding an individual. This can be done by adopting either a racist or non-racist attitude, where the act of either acknowledging race or refusing to do so continue to construct race because race is placed at the center of discourse. Performative acts imply that individuals are implicated in that which they seek to deconstruct (Butler, 2000).

Narrative theory views identity as being constructed through the telling of stories, individuals make sense of themselves and their lives through the stories they can tell or

not tell about themselves (Ricoeur, 1984 as cited in Woodruffe-Burton & Elliot, 2005). This researcher conceptualized race and racial identity as constructed by stories. Relationships are the center of this process because meaning making happens when these stories are told, or not told. These stories include individual narratives as well as collective narratives. Individuals construct a racial identity through the process of making meaning out of the stories they tell about their own experience, at the same time collective narratives influence how individuals make meaning out of their own personal stories. Historical attitudes and current attitudes retold through formal education, media, and interactions with others can all be conceptualized as collective narratives. The concept of race is constructed through these narratives, and identity is formed through the meaning making process involved in the telling of these stories. For individuals whose narratives are not validated by larger collectives narratives, the process of meaning making and identity formation becomes complicated.

It is important to note that social workers are not outsiders looking in as race is constructed in our society; rather they play a role, both as individuals and as professionals in this formation. This process can be understood both through Queer Theory and Narrative Theory.

Through a Queer Theory lens, social workers can be understood to be individuals who contribute to the construction of race through performatives. Social workers are human beings that exist within a racist system, and therefore are individual performers within this system. Social workers also contribute to the construction of race by focusing on race in their research and direct practice. The profession of social work is committed to aiding oppressed populations, and this implies that these populations must be defined.

Often this means focusing on social inequalities based on race; taking this stance is a performative act that contributes to the construction of race.  The intent of this researcher is not to imply that social workers should discontinue their commitment to oppressed populations, rather social workers should strive to view their own work with a critical lens.

Narrative Theory offers another lens by which to understand how social work contributes to the construction of race and racial identity. Once again, social workers are individuals with their own identities, constructed through narratives.  The interaction between social workers and their clients contribute to the narratives formed by both social worker and client.  This interaction offers the opportunity to provide validation to an individual's experience that may otherwise not be heard; at the same time this interaction has the potential to dismiss these same experiences.  In either case, meaning making happens in the interaction.  At a macro level, the profession of social work also constructs narratives.  Through research and publications, social workers construct narratives around issues of race, racial identity, and racism.  These narratives become collective narratives that impact the way that individuals and society at large construct race.

*Recommendations*

Both Queer Theory and Narrative Theory have the potential to be a useful tool for social workers in their practice as they offer an opportunity for social workers to broaden their understanding of the construction of race and racial identity. This researcher recommends that changes be made in the way that social workers are taught to reflect on

their work, and that Queer Theory and Narrative Theory be used as methods to aid in this reflection and understanding.

Social worker students are often faced with the overwhelming task of learning what is currently called cultural competency. In many cases, what is referred to as cultural competency involves adopting non-racist attitudes and behaviors. This process may at times seem daunting to the new social worker, and it leaves social workers with the idea of this unreachable goal as the target they should be striving to reach. This researcher takes the stance that cultural competency is an unreachable goal because this concept exist within a racist system, which contributes to reinforcing a racist system.

Unfortunately, there often is not room for the uncomfortable acknowledgement of the contributions the profession of social work makes to the construction of race. Jeffery (2005) pointed out that the use of anti-racist pedagogies implies being critical of social work, and there has not been room in social work curriculum for the critique of social work. Introducing Queer Theory to students as a framework by which to understand race and racial identity, as well as professional identity, will provide students with a tool in which to critically understand society and their own work.

Narrative Theory can also be an important tool for social workers. Narrative Theory offers a way for social workers to reflect on their own personal narratives, and how these narratives and collective narratives have affected the way that they understand race and racial identity. Narrative Theory offers a tool for self-reflection that can be instrumental for social workers as they interact with individuals and families. In the opinion of this researcher, social workers are changed by the work that they do, and Narrative Theory provides a way to understand that change.

42

REFERENCES

American Anthropological Association (n.d). *Race: A public education project.* Retrieved
    on June 23, 2010 from http://www.aaanet.org/resources/A-Public-Education-
    Program.cfm

Armacost, M. (2000). Foreword. In P. Skerry, *Counting on the Census?: Race, group
    identity, and the evasion of politics.* (pp. vii-viii). Washington, DC: Brookings
    Institute Press.

Botella, L. & Herrero, O. (2000). A relational constructivist approach to narrative
    therapy. *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling, & Health, 3*(3), 407-
    419. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.* New York,
    NY: Routledge. (Original work published 1990)

Butler, J. (2000). Critically Queer. In P. du Gay, J. Evans, & P. Redman (Eds.), *Identity:
    A reader* (pp. 108-117).  Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (Original work
    published 1993)

Croll, P. (2007). Modeling Determinants of White Racial Identity: Results from a New
    National Survey. *Social Forces*, *86*(2), 613-642. Retrieved from Academic
    Search Premier database.

Ehlers, N. (2008). Retroactive Phantasies: Discourse, Discipline, and the Production of
    Race. *Social Identities*, *14*(3), 333-347. doi:10.1080/13504630802088219.

Fineman, M.A (2009). Introduction. In M.A. Fineman, J.E Jackson, & A.P. Romero
    (Eds.), *Feminist and queer legal theory: Intimate encounters, uncomfortable
    conversations* (pp. 1-6). Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Ford, R. (2007). What's Queer about Race?. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *106*(3), 477-484.
    Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helms's white and people of color racial identity
    models. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.),
    *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181-198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Herrnstein, R.J. & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in
    American life.* New York, NY: The Free Press.

Jeffery, D. (2005). 'What good is anti‑racist social work if you can't master it'?:
    Exploring a Paradox in Anti‑racist Social Work Education. *Race, Ethnicity &
    Education*, *8*(4), 409-425. doi:10.1080/13613320500324011.

Lee, S. (1993). Racial classifications in the US census: 1890-1990. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *16*(1), 75.

Mattingly, C. (2008). Reading Minds and Telling Tales in a Cultural Borderland. *Ethos,* 36(1), 136-154. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1352.2008.00008.x.

McKenzie, S. (2010). Genders and Sexualities in Individuation: Theoretical and Clinical Explorations. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *55*(1), 91-111. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5922.2009.01826.x.

Miller J. & Garran. A. (2008). *Racism in the United States: Implications for helping professionals.* Belmont, CA: Thompson Brooks/Cole

Miramon, C. (2009). Noble dogs, noble blood: The invention of the concept of race in the late Middle Ages in M. Eliav-Feldon, B. Issac, & J. Ziegler (Eds.), *The origins of racism in the west* (pp. 200-216). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (approved 1996, revised 2008). *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers.* Retrieved from http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp

O'Donnell, J. (2002). Talking about race: The role of Racial Identity Development Models in Antiracist Pedagogy. *Simile*, *2*(1), N.PAG. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Omi, M. (2008). Asian-Americans: the Unbearable Whiteness of Being?. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *55*(5), B56-B58. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Phillips, L., & Stewart, M. (2008). "I Am Just So Glad You Are Alive": New Perspectives on Non-Traditional, Non-Conforming, and Transgressive Expressions of Gender, Sexuality, and Race Among African Americans. *Journal of African American Studies*, *12*(4), 378-400. doi:10.1007/s12111-008-9053-6.

Reynolds, A.L., & Baluch, S. (2001). Racial identity theories in counseling: A literature review and evaluation. In C. L. Wijeyesinghe, & B.W Jackson III, (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development: A theoretical and practical anthology (pp153-181).* New York, NY: New York University Press.

Rockquemore, K., & Brunsma, D. (2004). Negotiating Racial Identity: Biracial Women and Interactional Validation. *Women & Therapy*, *27*(1/2), 85-102. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Rockquemore, K., Brunsma, D., & Delgado, D. (2009). Racing to Theory or Retheorizing Race? Understanding the Struggle to Build a Multiracial Identity Theory. *Journal of Social Issues*, *65*(1), 13-34. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.01585.x.

Rodriguez, J. (2003). *Que*er *latinidad: Identity practices, discursive spaces.* New York, NY: New York University Press.

Rudd, A. (2009). In Defence of Narrative. *European Journal of Philosophy*, *17*(1), 60-75. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0378.2007.00272.x.

Samuels, G. (2009). Using the extended case method to explore identity in a multiracial context. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *32*(9), 1599 1618. doi: 10.1080 /0141987 0902749117.

Sanders, V., & Akbar, M. (2003). The Understanding of Race and the Construction of African American Identity. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, *27*(2), 80-88 Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Saul, S. (2005, June 24). F.D.A. Approves a Heart Drug for African-Americans. *New York Times*, p. 2. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Schneiderman, J. (2010). In Defense of Queer Theory. *Gay and Lesbian World Review,* 17(1), 11-15. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Skerry, P. (2000). *Counting on the Census?: Race, group identity, and the evasion of politics.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press.

Smedley, A. (1999). *Race in North America: Origin and evolution of a worldview* (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Smedley, A., & Smedley, B. (2005). Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives on the Social Construction of Race. *American Psychologist*, *60*(1), 16-26. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.60.1.16.

Somers, M. (1994). The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory & Society*, *23*(5), 605-649. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database

Stein, A., & Plummer, K. (1994). "I Can't Even Think Straight" "Queer" Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology. *Sociological Theory*, *12*(2), 178. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Sullivan, N. (2003). *A critical introduction to queer theory.* Washington Square, NY: New York University Press.

Taylor, R. (1997). The Changing Meaning of Race in the Social Sciences: Implications for Social Work Practice. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, *67*(3), 277-298. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Tehranian, J. (2008). Middle Easterners: Sometimes White, Sometimes Not.
(pp. B52-B54). Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from Academic Search
Premier database.

Todorov, T. (2000). Race and Racism. In L. Back & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Theories of race
and racism: A reader.* (pp. 64-70). New York, NY: Routledge Student Readers.

Trepagnier, B. (2001). Deconstructing Categories: The Exposure of Silent Racism.
*Symbolic Interaction*, *24*(2), 141-163. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier
database.

U.S Census Bureau. (2010). *The questions on the Form* Retrieved on June 23, 2010 from
http://2010.census.gov/2010census/how/interactive-form.php.

Ward, J. (2008). Dude-Sex: White Masculinities and 'Authentic' Heterosexuality Among
Dudes Who Have Sex With Dudes. *Sexualities*, *11*(4), 414-434. Retrieved from
Academic Search Premier database.

White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton &
Company.

White, M. & Epson, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends.* New York, NY:
W.W. Norton & Company.

Wilson, Y. (2009). Why the race debate is far from over. *Quill*, *97*(2), 34. Retrieved from
Communication & Mass Media Complete database.

Winston, C., Wall Rice, D., Bradshaw, B., Lloyd, D., Harris, L., Burford, T., et al.
(2004). Science success, narrative theories of personality, and race self
complexity: Is pace represented in the identity construction of African American
adolescents?. *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development*, *2004*(106),
55-77. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Woodruffe-Burton, H. & Elliot, R. (2005). Compensatory Consumption and Narrative
Identity theory. *Advances in Consumer Research,* 32, 461-465.

Zack, N. (1998). *Thinking about race.* Boston, MA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.