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AUTHOR Renn, Kristen A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the growing interest among social scientists in studying the experiences of so-called mixed-race (or multiracial, biracial, or mixed heritage) individuals, when the study of multiraciality risks reinforcing the notion of fixed races. Distinguishing mixed-race people as a category assumes that there are pure races to begin with and that there are people who are not mixed-race. The paper begins with a brief review of the history of the study of multiraciality, then it poses questions raised by the study of the experiences of mixed-race people. It presents five alternative philosophical approaches to addressing this question, and it suggests how the study of multiraciality might be done without further reinforcing the notion of static racial categories. The paper maintains throughout that race does not exist except as a social construction. (Contains 69 references.) (SM)

Tilting at Windmills: The Paradox of Researching Mixed-Race

Kristen A. Renn

Southern Illinois University
Educational Administration & Higher Education – Mailcode 4606
Carbondale, IL 62901-4606
krenn@siu.edu

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Distinguishing "mixed-race" people as a category deserving of scholarly attention appears to assume two conditions: 1) that there are "pure" races to begin with and 2) that there are people who are not "mixed-race." A growing portion of the research community – particularly social scientists – do not make these fundamental assumptions (Chandler, 1997). Racial categories have been shown to be socially, rather than biologically, constructed. They do not exist as scientifically pure categories into which all humans can be classified according to phenotype. Why, then, is there growing interest among these same social scientists in studying the experiences of so-called mixed-race (or multiracial, biracial, mixed-heritage, etc.) individuals when the study of multiraciality risks reinforcing the notion of fixed races?

In this paper, I will address this important question through a brief review of the history of the study of multiraciality. I will pose questions raised by the study of the experience of mixed-race people. I will present alternative philosophical approaches to addressing these questions, and finally I will suggest how the study of multiraciality might be done without further reinforcing the notion of static racial categories.

Throughout this paper, I will maintain that race does not exist except as a social construction. I rely on readers of this text to maintain that assumption as well. When I refer to "race", I mean the notion of race as it has been socially constructed in the United States. I will occasionally emphasize the social construction of race through use of "scare quotes" or other devices. When I use terms such as multiracial, mixed-race, or biracial, I am referring to the socially constructed state of being of more than one so-called "pure" racial category. It will become clear early in the paper that all of these terms are problematic, but they are the best option available until there is some other way to write about how we study this thing we call race.

The study of multiraciality

The literature on multiraciality divides mainly into four categories: the history of mixed-race people in the United States, models of bi/multiracial identity development, theories about biracial identity and biracial individuals, and popular literature about multiracial individuals. The majority of writing comes from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and anthropology, and the

interdisciplinary fields of education and ethnic studies. With the exception of writings about the history of mixed-race people, the research is mainly empirical, with a shift from quantitative to ethnographic studies over the last 10 to 15 years. Recently, popular media has taken up the issue of multiraciality in drawing attention to the ancestry of sports and entertainment personalities such as Tiger Woods, Keanu Reeves, and Vanessa Williams. This brief review provides a backdrop against which to examine evolving ideas about the study of race and mixed-race.

There are a number of excellent histories of mixed-race people and racial mixing in the United States (see Daniel, 1992; Spickard, 1989; Williamson, 1995). These histories offer proof that the myth of racial purity is false. They describe how blacks and whites in seventeenth and early eighteenth century engaged in sexual unions that produced the first "mulattos" in the British colonies (Daniel, 1992; Williamson, 1995). Researchers also describe the importance of the history of the United States Census to understanding how and when various so-called racial groups came to be called "white," "mulatto," "Indians," "Negro," "Mexican," "Chinese," and "Japanese" (Goldberg, 1995, pp. 240-242). Many histories of multiraciality refer to the 1967 Supreme Court ruling in *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*. This ruling struck down the Virginia law proscribing miscegenation and is widely considered a landmark in the movement for interracial marriages and multiracial identity (Thornton & Wason, 1995).

As multiraciality gained momentum as a legitimate social identity, a political movement made up of people who identify as multiracial evolved and has been documented. Though multiraciality is still a contested identity–both outside and inside the movement–theory has emerged to describe the growing movement. One theory proposes three major approaches within multiracial politics (Nakashima, 1996). The first approach is *the struggle for inclusion in traditional racial/ethnic communities*. Multiracial people can work to have all of their (mono)racial parent communities accept them in their multiraciality or can work to be accepted as full members of these communities (Nakashima, 1996). The second approach seeks to create *a new agenda for a movement of multiracial people*. This approach assumes that the experience of being of mixed heritage has enough common themes to constitute a meaningful reference group. The third

approach seeks to *dismantle dominant racial ideology and group boundaries to create connections across communities into a community of humanity*. The central thinking of this approach is that binary thinking and the boundaries it facilitates must be destroyed in order to end oppression based on race, gender, class, etc. (Nakashima, 1996). Owning multiple positionalities and transgressing boundaries places multiracial people not as marginal but as liminal and advantaged, as in Anzaldua's (1987) construction of *mestiza* identity. In her final analysis, Nakashima (1996) moves from historical and theoretical analysis to call for the construction of a multiracial identity that reflects the diversity of voices in the multiracial movement.

Models of "biracial" or "multiracial" identity development make up the second major category of research. Traditional psychosocial and social interactionist models of "minority identity development" (see Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1979; Cross, 1987, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1995) follow a general format of increasing sophistication from lack of awareness of race or racial difference through immersion in "minority" racial identity to integration of race as an aspect of a complete adult identity. My characterization of racial identity theories is oversimplified, but it serves to illustrate an inherent problem in the models; they do not account for the possibility that an individual may have a mixture of heritages which cannot be neatly separated for an immersion experience. Kerwin & Ponterotto (1995), Kich (1992), King & DaCosta (1996), Poston (1990), Renn (1998, 1999, forthcoming), Root (1992), Wallace (1999), and Williams (1996) agree that multiracial identity exists in a psychosocial context, but they argue that the traditional models pose problems in exploring healthy bi- or multiracial identity formation.

Poston was a pioneer in biracial identity development theory. In his 1990 article "The Biracial Identity Development Model: A Needed Addition" he was the first to propose a series of stages that could account for the development of a healthy biracial identity. Kich (1992) and Kerwin & Ponterotto (1996) followed with variations on the stage model.

Arguing that stage models do not account for the reality of mixed-race individuals' lived experience, King & DaCosta (1996), Renn (1998, 1999, forthcoming), Root (1992b), Wallace (1999), and Williams (1996) offer alternative models. These models rely on the capacity for

situational identification with one race, more than one race, no races, or mixed-race identities. These researchers take different approaches (psychological, sociological, socio-political, etc.), but tend to agree that "healthy" mixed-heritage identity is not stage-based or monolithic. Even multiracial siblings might, as adults, identify in very different ways according to a lifetime of identity-influencing interactions that Williams (1996) calls "What are you?" questions. Renn (1999, 2000) applies an ecological model to the study of multiracial identity to account for the process of identity development as well as the outcome.

These non-linear models of multiracial identity development add a postmodern edge to the body of literature on theories about mixed-race people. This third major area multiracial research falls into four categories; the first three were identified by Thornton & Wason (1995) and augmented by Renn (1998) with the fourth. They are: the problem approach, the equivalent approach, the variant approach, and the advantaged approach. Each approach casts mixed-race people differently in relation to self, family, and society.

The problem approach encompasses much of the pre-Poston writing on mixed-race people in the United States. It assumes that monoracial identity is preferable and that multiracial people experience problems because they are "between" races. Moving back and forth across color lines is viewed as maladaptive. Stonequist's (1937) Marginal Man was the foundation for this mode of research, though it continued into the last decade of the twentieth century primarily through psychological studies of clinical populations (see Brown, 1990; Gibbs, 1989; Hershel, 1995).

Proponents of the equivalent approach conclude that mixed-race people and monoracial people (generally assumed in the research to be people of color) undergo similar identity development and assimilation processes with similar outcomes. This research appears to be in reaction to the problem approach and includes several studies designed to test whether biracial individuals were as well-adjusted in general as their peers (see Cauce, Hiraga, Mason, Aguilar, Ordonez & Gonzales, 1992; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Hall, 1992; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson & Harris, 1993). In the area of ethnic identity in particular, a number of studies showed that

multiracial people are equally well-adjusted as their monoracial peers of color (see Field, 1996; Grove, 1991; Sodowsky, Kwan & Pannu, 1995).

Departing from the equivalent approach, some researchers argue that taking a variant approach to mixed-race identity allows for the uniqueness of the multiracial experience and the possibility of situational identity patterns. The concern of these researchers is how multiracial individuals live in a society predicated on monoracial definitions. Bradshaw (1992), Brown (1995), Standen (1996), and Stephan (1992) contribute to this approach which is built on the theories of Kich (1992), Poston (1990), and Root (1996a).

Finally, the advantaged approach proposes that mixed-race people are not only a separate, equivalent group, but also that the experience of this separateness confers advantages to them. In discussing resolution of "other" status and four types of "border crossings" mixed-race people encounter, Root (1990, 1996a) alluded to the increased cognitive flexibility prompted by and required by these situations. Kich (1992) emphasized cognitive flexibility required to transcend external definition and move toward self-definition, and Weisman (1996) acknowledged the reflexivity required to achieve a sense of "positive alterity." Daniel (1996), in an apparent reference back to Stonequist (1937) used the term "positive marginality" to describe the situation of mixed-race individuals.

Popular literature about multiracial individuals makes up the fourth and final major area of the so-called multiracial literature. From the mid-1990s, a growing literature of personal narratives and other non-academic writing has augmented the empirical and theoretical work on the lives of mixed-race people (e.g. Azoulay, 1997; Baron, 1998; Barrath, 1995; Camper, 1994; Chao, 1996; Jones, 1994; Minerbrook, 1996; Moraga, 1993; Williams, 1995). Authored almost exclusively by mixed-race people, these essays, autobiographies, poems and novels help create a multiracial culture. In contrast to the "tragic mulatto" stories prevalent until around the middle of the twentieth century (see Streeter, 1996 for an analysis of this literature), recent work gives voice directly to multiracial people. Together with book-length reports of ethnographic studies of biracial people (see Funderberg, 1994; Tizard & Phoenix, 1993) and growing attention in the popular media,

personal narratives provide access to information on how multiracial people understand and represent their lives. The success of mixed-race individuals in public arenas (sports, entertainment, news media) has spawned near-weekly articles in newspapers and magazines (from Time to People to Glamour) about multiraciality and mixed-race identity.

The paradox of "multiracial" research

In this paper, I am concerned primarily with scholarly writing about multiraciality. This brief history of the literature on multiracial issues, however, is important in understanding the current moment in what I will loosely call multiracial scholarship. Tracing the history of literature from the legal establishment of racial categories to theories about how mixed-race identity develops, through changing ideas about the lives of mixed-race people to the publicity surrounding mixed-race celebrities allows us to see where we have been, where we are now, and what might lie ahead.

We are, in fact, at a crucial moment in research on multiraciality. The idea that race is socially, rather than biologically, constructed is well-accepted in the academy and is gaining purchase in the larger society (Chandler, 1997). Most recent research related to multiracial identity begins from the standpoint that racial categories are socially constructed and racial identity is constructed on an individual level through social interactions and cognitive development. Acceptance of these tenets begs the question: if we believe that race is socially constructed, to what extent are we re-inscribing fixed racial categories by studying multiraciality? If there are no "races" how can there be "mixed races"? Before proceeding as a research community, we need to address these questions and explore potential solutions.

Regarding the ways in which research on multiraciality reinforces existing racial constructions, Ferber (1995) takes fellow sociologists to task for assuming the givenness of discrete races. She criticizes research methods that assume race exists without offering some explanation of how categories were established. She holds researchers accountable for these weaknesses, and claims that "when researchers fail to discuss what actually constitutes a racial group, they reproduce race as a naturally existing category" (Ferber, 1995, p. 157). She decries

the separation of "we the researchers who know that race is a social construct [who] have no choice but to use those categories" from "they, the people in society who believe in these categories" (p. 160).

I propose that although it first appears to reinforce the static nature of racial categories, research on multiraciality does not necessarily have to do so. To be sure, even the terms "biracial," "multiracial," and "mixed-race" are predicated on the old-fashioned notion of scientifically distinct races that can, like paint, be mixed together. Much of the writing about the lives of multiracial people–whether from the problem, equivalent, variant, or advantaged approaches–holds an underlying assumption that mixed-race individuals are inherently different from "monoracial" people. This assumption is premised on the primacy of fixed racial categories. The early models of biracial identity development (see Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) assume the same tenets. Historical writing, many personal narratives, and the later, constructivist models of multiracial identity (see Renn 1998, 1999, 2000, forthcoming; Wallace, 1999) challenge these assumptions by including the possibility for mixed-race individuals themselves to have agency in determining situational identities that might include the option of deconstructing race and opting out of so-called racial identity altogether.

The lived experience of multiracial people, as described in some of the research literature, through personal narratives and in some of the popular media, however, draws a stark picture of the ways in which mixed-race individuals are deeply affected by living in a highly-racialized society, even if they and the scholars who write about them believe that race is socially constructed. It is not the right time to say, "Well, since race is socially constructed and multiraciality doesn't really exist, we don't need to study those issues." We live in a society in which race and having a racial identity matter very much, both to those of the majority "white" group and to so-called "people of color." A firm defender of the social construction of races, Zack (1993) nevertheless writes, "To argue, in effect that races do not exist, in the face of powerful belief structures that presuppose the existence of races and that posit racial identities for individuals, is something like tilting at windmills" (p. 4).

In arguing for an ongoing scholarship of multiraciality, she argues, "the American biracial [meaning black and white] system does not permit the identification of individuals, in the third person, as mixed race. If individuals cannot be identified, in the third person, as mixed race, then it is impossible for them to have mixed-race identities, in the first person" (p. 4). In effect, if we do not create alternatives to the prevailing monoracial viewpoint, people cannot identify in any other way. The lived reality of multiracial individuals, as described through the research, autobiographical, and popular literature, compels us to create a scholarship of multiraciality. The challenge is to do so while not re-inscribing the notion of "racial purity" and static racial categories.

Alternative approaches

Fortunately, these are not new questions among those who do research on race in education. Scholars exploring issues of multiraciality do not need to begin from scratch in developing approaches to studying issues of race without de facto re-inscribing rigid racial constructions. Scholars of multiraciality--and multiracial scholars in particular--may have a greater stake in the issue ("How can I study a situation which does not even exist in a world of 'pure' racial constructions?"), but they are not alone in wrestling with the dilemma. In this section, I present two approaches for resolving the question of how to do research on multiraciality without re-inscribing racial construction. In the next section, I present specific strategies for conducting and writing research on multiracial issues.

One promising approach is Gutmann's (1996) notion of being "color conscious." In color consciousness Gutmann includes "the package of physical characteristics" including "skin color, various facial features, and assumed ancestry, along with the racial identity that is socially attached to these physical features and assumed ancestry" (Gutmann, 1996, p. 110). Gutmann proposes a shift from the "color blindness" we have been taught as a societal ideal towards this color consciousness, which includes a recognition that "a child's life chances in the United States today vary with his or her color, even after controlling for other factors" (p. 110). Color blindness assumes that "the legacy of racial injustice does not exist, or [has] been entirely overcome, or is morally irrelevant to public policy, or is not something with which we must be concerned either as

democratic citizens or moral being" (p. 110). Gutmann (1996) also proposes a shift from "race consciousness," which assumes that

> racial identity is a scientifically based fact of differentiation among individuals that has morally relevant implications for public policy. Color consciousness rejects this idea of racial identity. But color consciousness recognizes the ways in which skin color and other superficial features of individuals adversely and unfairly affect their life chances. (p. 112, italics added).

A color conscious approach inherently acknowledges both the social construction of race and its real-world effects on individuals and groups. Explicitly incorporating color consciousness into research on multiraciality foregrounds the role of physical appearance in identity and group membership. As Gutmann (1996) writes, "Proponents of both color blindness and color consciousness agree that the fiction of racial identification cannot survive scrutiny. It is therefore best brought out in the open among open-minded people" (p. 113). Just as the idea of "mixed race" draws attention to the fact that we have categories we consider "unmixed," Gutmann's color consciousness draws attention to the fact that we have socially constructed racial categories based on physical features and that these social constructions have very real consequences in society.

A second approach to researching multiraciality without further reproducing fixed racial categories is Naomi Zack's (1995) philosophy of "microdiversity" and "racelessness." Because "diversity is normally used on the assumption that there are different racial groups" Zack developed the term "microdiversity" to refer "to the reality and scholarship of racial differences within single individuals" (Zack, 1995, p. ix). She goes on to say

> I am pessimistic about the long-term success of any intellectual (or practical) project of microdiversity because I think that current ideas of diversity (or racial difference) are based on outdated pseudoscientific beliefs about race; and the Balkanization of a bad idea, no matter how well-enshrined that idea is historically, can only lead to more trouble. But, also in the long run, the trouble will have been a necessary catharsis toward the ultimate racial harmony that can result only from a complete dissolution of

> the American concept of race as a social construction rooted in colonialization, exploitation, and slavery. The reality of mixed race needs to be written and talked out before the illusion of race itself can be dispelled. (Zack, 1995, p. x).

The study of microdiversity, then, is a necessary, temporary means to the end of deconstructing racial categories. Later in the same volume, Zack (1995) introduces "racelessness" as the logical outcome of adopting a theory of microdiversity, "Because race means pure race, the opposite of race is not racelessness but racial impurity, or what I have here called microdiversity. The next step after microdiversity is racelessness. Racelessness is the next freeing stage after microdiversity" (p. 301).

Like Gutmann's (1996) color consciousness, Zack's (1995) microdiversity/racelessness draws attention to the social construction of race. By asserting the reality of infinite possible combinations of "races" within individuals the microdiversity approach exposes the myth of racial "purity." And if the construction of race itself relies on the assumption that races are pure, the theory of microdiversity automatically propels the researcher forward to a theory of racelessness. In fact, Zack believes that there is no way forward other than through.

Strategies for scholars

The theories of color consciousness and microdiversity are useful in framing research on multiraciality, but because research is conducted and reported within a society that continues to hold firmly to the importance of static racial categories, theories alone are not sufficient to do this work while minimizing the socially reproductive effects of academic research. A simple way to avoid the dilemma of researching issues related to race without reifying racial categories is simply not to do the work. I do not advocate this strategy. Short of this unsatisfactory response, there are several ways scholars can do their work while advancing the notion that although race is socially constructed, it has very real social consequences. In this section, I will suggest five ways to reduce the risk of reinscribing static racial categories through scholarly work on multiraciality.

First, I propose that qualitative inquiry is better suited to the study of multiraciality than quantitative inquiry. When we treat racial identity–even once separated from biology–as something that can be quantified, we re-inscribe race as an objective essence. Even if we decided to risk conducting such nonsensical science, issues of sampling and validity pose threats to soundness in quantitative studies of mixed-race people (Root, 1992a). Root, a clinical psychologist, recommended using non-clinical samples in order to determine the "normative" experience of biracial people. However, she believed that adequate samples can be hard to assemble because multiracial people are nonrandomly distributed in the United States and are a numerical minority on the mainland. Furthermore, because definitions of race and ethnicity are not universal, identification and recruitment of multiracial subjects is complex, almost always yielding selective samples. Root (1992a) suggested that qualitative methods were better, as they lend themselves to the small samples typically available when studying multiracial people.

Beyond the basic insufficiency of quantitative methods to study topics in this area, a qualitative approach offers a number of strengths that are particularly useful in studying a social construction like race without further fixing it as a static, given concept. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998)

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Inquiry is purported to be within a value-free framework. (p. 8).

To be sure, it is possible to conduct positivist and post-positivist qualitative research that would do nothing to illuminate the socially constructed nature of race. Adherence to a critical theory or constructivist approach within qualitative research, as Renn (1998, 1999, forthcoming) and Wallace (1999) do, takes into account the epistemological and ontological perspectives that allow

us to see race as socially constructed and the experiences of the multiracial people under study as only partially knowable by others.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) "constructivist paradigm" describes an approach which is pluralist and relativist, seeing multiple, conflicting constructions, each of which is meaningful. "Constructivists are antiessentialists. They assume that what we take to be self-evident kinds (e.g., man, woman, truth, self) are actually the products of complicated discursive practices" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 236). Because understandings and meanings of multiraciality are themselves born of a pluralist and relativist epistemology, these qualitative research approaches are the preferred strategy to research in this area.

A second strategy for researching multiraciality without further reifying race is to draw attention to the constructed nature of race in the context of other socially constructed categories and identities. In describing his experience "in the margins of sex and race," Kich (1996) proposed that "developmental processes for those who are both biracial and bisexual haven necessitated complex and conscious decisions about the expression of these *other*ed racial and sexual identities" (p. 264). His analysis of marginality in both sexual and racial realms makes clear the ways in which individuals construct identities within the categories constructed by society. Allman (1996) describes the ways in which gender is racialized, race is sexualized, and sexuality is both racialized and gendered. She argues that "race, gender, and sexuality exist as a sort of unstable triad; shifts in one create disturbances in the other two" (p. 279). Her connections among the notions of race, gender, and sexuality remind the reader that all are constructed and inextricably bound to one another. These examples show how race–and mixed-race in particular–can be discussed in the context of other socially constructed categories/identities while drawing attention to their construction and its effects on individuals.

The third strategy I propose works in conjunction with the first two. It is fairly simple to describe, yet requires an effort on the part of the writer that seems to deter its use. This strategy is to include, early in a written account of research on multiraciality, a clear statement of how terms related to conceptions of race are being used in that particular paper. This "disclaimer" strategy

answers in spirit Ferber's (1995) call for researchers to state clearly some explanation of how racial categories were constructed, while offering the researcher the opportunity to introduce an alternative definition of terms.

One version of this strategy offers a brief statement to the effect that although race is socially constructed and has no biological basis, the author will use generally accepted designations for (generally accepted) racial categories in order to avoid confusion on the part of the reader. I consider this version of the strategy minimally effective (though better than nothing) because it basically says, "Yes, race is socially constructed, but to save us all some trouble, I'm going to continue to use the language that maintains this construction. Please bear with me." There is little engagement with the reader, whose notions of "race" may not be disrupted at all. Furthermore, this strategy allows the writer to rely on her/his assumptions about what the reader believes about the construction of race and multiraciality.

Ratcliffe (1994) takes a more sophisticated approach to discussing race, but still leaves the term intact. After discussing the history of racial construction, he describes various kinds of racism, including state, institutionalized, media, and academic. He then says

> Despite the potential dangers of using the same term in such different contexts, and despite the problems with "race", both will be retained as pivotal concepts in the current volume. However, they are not presented uncritically, nor are they seen as representing ideas which were, or are, necessarily distinct *in essence* from (say) nationalism and ethnicity. (p. 6)

Ratcliffe goes beyond a mere disclaimer, but does not explain why he has decided to retain the use of racial terms.

A more explicit version of this strategy requires more work of the writer and the reader. For example, in their work on educating pre-service teachers through a pedagogy of whiteness, philosophers Adkins and Hytten (2000) write:

> We use the term whiteness purposefully both to name a constellation of forces and also because it reminds us of the face of the culture of power in the schools. ... We work

> from an understanding of whiteness not as substantive (i.e., lending itself to a booth at a multicultural food fair), but conceptual (i.e., lending itself to discussions of systems of privilege, cultural capital, and dominant interests). Along with that, we do not use whiteness in the way of an essentialized identity that all white people have internalized, but as widely circulating discursive forms that contribute to, but do not constitute, people's identities and experiences in society and its institutions [Foucault, 1983]. Admittedly, this is simply an iteration of various approaches to studying issues of power, domination, and reproduction relative to gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability, as well as race. From that, there may be some good reasons not to attach the term "whiteness" to it, such that the term may reify the emphasis on race and obscure other matters of privilege and power. And yet, "whiteness" offers a symbolically efficient way to name a constellation of social forces and cultural practices that systematically impose and reinforce the dominant culture of our institutions. Furthermore, using the term whiteness pushes the matter of white racism to the forefront. (pp. 2-3)

This explanation involves a number of sophisticated and contested concepts, but it articulates a clear rationale for the use of "whiteness" in their scholarship and in their teaching. They admit that they use "whiteness" as a "symbolically efficient way" to describe a complex phenomenon, but they do not shirk their responsibility to define and problematize that phenomenon. I suggest that until we can assume that everyone reading our research agrees that the concept of race and mixed-race are problematic, we should invest our intellectual energy in–and "sacrifice" space in word-limited articles and chapters to–such explicit statements of what we mean when we use racial terms and how we justify their use.

The fourth strategy I propose involves drawing the reader's attention to the social construction of race not only with an explanation of terms early in the text, but through ongoing disruptive gestures. These gestures need not be so disruptive as to render the text opaque, though some authors may find that technique necessary for their purposes. I suggest careful examination

of and challenges to the conventions of writing. Use of italics, quotation marks, and "scare quotes" will draw reader's attention to unconventional uses of terms. Coupled with an early explanation of how these techniques will be used, they will remind the reader of the author's intentions not to reproduce racial categories through writing. Scare quotes around "race," for example, remind the reader that the term is being used not in the commonly-accepted way, but to indicate the social construction of race. Similarly, attention can be drawn to the notions of "multiracial" or "interracial."

There are other ways to disrupt the text without obscuring meanings. Non-standard uses of capitalization and parentheses are common. Although I have been questioned by more than one journal reviewer, I usually include the following footnotes when I report on a study I conducted involving college students:

> Throughout this article, I use the words biracial, multiracial, mixed race, and multiple heritage interchangeably. In order to create parity between mono- and multiracial descriptors, I have decided not to capitalize the names of racial categories (i.e. black, white, asian) except when a word relates specifically to a nation of origin (i.e. Samoan, Chinese). There is not general agreement in the multiracial literature as to terminology or conventions of capitalizing racial designators, and my choices are designed to minimize the notion of racial categories as immutable entities.
>
> According to the Office of Management and Budget Directive 15 (1997), the federal government defines five racial categories as: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White. In addition, the government recognizes one ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino. Participants in this study were multiracial (parents from more than one federal racial designation, such as white and asian) rather than multiethnic (parents from more than one ethnicity, such as Korean-Japanese). (Renn, forthcoming, pp. 1 & 2)

In this context, my concern is with drawing attention to the privileging of "monoracial" over "multiracial" identifiers. Throughout the text, readers (and my persistent spell-check tool) confront

the uncommon appearance of "black, asian, and native american." My intention/hope is that they also consider in what ways these terms are or are not the same as the more commonly non-capitalized "white" in the context of research involving individuals who may not identify with any of those terms.

The fifth and final strategy I propose involves the relationship between academic writing and The Rest of The World. Most academic writing never gets into wide circulation. One might therefore argue that scholarship on multiraciality does not reify popular notions of race as a fixed category because no one but like-minded scholars (i.e. those who are already supposed to know that race is socially constructed) will read it. This view ignores the reality that there are some academics who do not, in fact, believe that race is socially constructed. Furthermore, it denies the potential for academic research to influence the larger society. Putting aside the internal dynamics of academia, I turn to the potential for social change through scholarship. I call this the "Oprah" strategy, because Oprah Winfrey believes that through her access to public opinion she can change people's minds about society. In short, the Oprah strategy involves sharing our research with the public, including educators, policy makers, and our (literal) next door neighbors.

There is not space in this paper to outline a full agenda for social change through educational research, but I will make a few commonsense proposals. First, we need to do research that is relevant to educational practice and policy. Second, we need to write about our research in ways that are accessible and persuasive. A corollary is that we need to tailor our writing for different audiences; a report to the school committee will take a different form from a newspaper opinions piece or from a personal narrative for a public radio broadcast. Third, we need to continue to press at the edges of our own understandings of how race is constructed and operates in the United States and how it affects what we choose to study, how, when, and with whom. Not everyone needs to do abstract philosophical writing about multiraciality (just as not everyone needs to do ethnographies of mixed-race schoolchildren), but someone does. Which leads to the fourth proposal, which is that we need to allow the strengths of different research paradigms and methods, as well as individual researchers, to contribute to the discussion of multiraciality. Finally,

the Oprah strategy requires researchers to consider ourselves always as educators. Like Adkins and Hytten (2000), we can integrate our philosophies about the construction of race into our writing as well as our teaching to create internally-consistent approaches to scholarship and pedagogy.

Conclusion

This paper ends where it began, with the question of how can we do research on multiraciality without further reproducing the idea of race as a static category. My summary of research in this area illustrates the inherent problems. Gutmann's (1996) theory of color consciousness and Zack's (1995) theory of microdiversity offer two philosophical approaches, but do not deal with the specifics of how to do research. I have suggested five strategies for minimizing the reproductive effects of academic research on multiraciality. There are many more than the space of one paper allows.

One unasked question remains: Given the risks of reifying racial categories through research on multiracial issues, why do it at all? And why any researcher in particular? It is tempting to leave such risky work to others. There are countless other interesting, meaningful areas of educational research. Why this work? Why now? And why you?

First, the number of mixed-race children and adults in education is growing (Schmidt, 1997). While we have statistics that tell us how members of designated racial categories fare in educational systems, we have no way to know how mixed-race individuals are doing. Furthermore, while we have developed programs to challenge and support members of various groups, very few schools offer support specifically for mixed-race students, faculty, or staff. Pre-service teachers and K-12 and higher education administration students have few resources for information on the lives, education, and needs of this growing population.

Second, doing research on multiraciality helps to create a space for mixed-race people and issues in education. Of mixed-race academics, Zack (1995) wrote:

> To write about one's mixed-race identity is as much to invent oneself or one's racial group, as to describe them. One invents oneself, on paper, as part of a theoretical inquiry, because outside of one's activities as an intellectual, that is, outside of the life

> of the mind, one has no secure racial existence. Mixed race is not recognized as an identity or form of culture by those individuals–the majority–who believe they are racially pure. ...
>
> Thus, the mixed-race self that invents itself on paper is a refugee to the life of the mind: Only on the printed page at this time can one begin to lay down the parameters of mixed-race identity and explore and criticize them. Outside one's professional life, mixed-race identity flashes on and off depending on whom one is interacting with. And administratively, within one's professional life, the record-keeping apparatus of the institution in question will most likely recategorize one in terms of the most disadvantaged or "under-represented" racial group that one has checked off on the relevant demographic form. Administrative compliance with Affirmative Action legal directives and the resultant financial rewards and humanitarian praise depend on such recategorization. (pp. 298-299)

The responsibility for questioning racial categories and "writing mixed-race into existence" does not fall only to Zack and other mixed-race academics. It falls broadly on all of us who do research in education and who teach others to do research. I am not convinced, as Zack is, that the study of microdiversity through "multiracial" individuals is the only way to move towards racelessness, but I am convinced that is one way to do so. And the belief that it is–and the hope that it brings–is why I have chosen to tilt at the windmills of constructivist scholarship on multiraciality.

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