Fall 2009

Critical Narrative of Multiracial Women's Personal Journey: Negotiating the Intersectionallity of Race and Gender Issues in a Monoracial Paradigm

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CRITICAL NARRATIVE OF MULTIRACIAL WOMEN'S PERSONAL JOURNEY: NEGOTIATING THE INTERSECTIONALLITY OF RACE AND GENDER ISSUES IN A MONORACIAL PARADIGM

by

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(Under the Direction of Delores D. Liston)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine how three women of color, mothers of Multiracial children, experience gender and racial identity issues in the context of United States; explore their choice of racial indicator for their children and the impact that raising multiracial children would have on their own racial identity. This study was informed by critical race feminist thought, framed by qualitative inquiry and oral history as research methodology. Throughout this study I have attempted to demonstrate that gender and race are significant factors in these three women's lived experiences.

The participants' accounts revealed how different aspects of sexism, racism, heritage pride, and racial invisibility have been a part of their lives, and influenced the choices of racial indicators for their multiracial children. There was ample evidence from the stories of these three participants that the racial identity indicator of their multiracial children and the consequences of these choices, provided a more significant set of apprehensions than the concerns these three

women had for their own gender and racial identity issues. Data was collected through semi-structured open ended interviews.

INDEX WORDS: Critical Race Feminism, Oral History, Monoracial Identities, Multiracial Identities, Interracial Family, Women of Color, Feminism, Sexism, Racism.

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2009

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Electronic Version Approved:
December 2009

DEDICATION

To my three musketeers, Nathan, Matthew and Wayne, you are the love of my life. To Dona Preta, my friend, and my mother for teaching me to be goal oriented and for instilling in me the desire to always succeed in all that I do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey of scholarship has been influenced and supported by many people. I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to these individuals, without whose help and loving concern this dissertation would never have been written.

My utmost gratitude and respect goes to Dr. Delores Liston, my mentor and committee Chair who not only chaired my committee with a deft hand, but guided me to finish the dissertation. Her unending guidance, expertise, and patience helped me complete this project. Throughout the years, she has not only been my advisor, but my advocate as well, and for that I am greatly indebted to her. I greatly appreciate her time, motivation, positive attitude, and wisdom. Her confidence in my ability and her conviction that this research project was possible sustained me and impelled me on to the completion of my research. Throughout the process, her insights, comments, suggestion, encouragements and advocacy were invaluable. My growth and development as scholar is due in great measure to her direction and her outstanding role model.

Dr. Delores Liston opened my eyes to a number of complex gender and racial issues, which served to enrich this dissertation. What was valued the most, however, was her support and motivation that was always present during many personal struggles and triumphs, and the fact that she always believed in me. Her support and faith in me has engendered strength in me that I did not know was there. I am also grateful to Dr. Michael Moore and Dr. Saundra Nettles, who encouraged and pushed me to go further in my analysis. Their talents and commitment to correctness in writing and research design have added to this scholarly endeavor. I am also

grateful to Dr. Ming Fang He whose abilities in qualitative research and knowledge of the methodology process have been extremely helpful. Her support for the premises of this research was essential to the finished product.

I want to thank my children Nathan and Matthew. I am grateful for their patience and understanding in allowing me to study, type, and spend time away from them, so that I could complete my dissertation. It's hard to find the language to convey my feeling for their love and encouragement throughout my many years of schooling, and the sacrifices that they have made to help me get to this point. They helped me to put the dissertation in perspective and were constant reminders of what's most important in life.

Next, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Wayne Nelson, my husband, partner, and best friend. His patience, encouragement and unswerving support and love, has been remarkable. He patiently and faithfully listened to me, edited my writings, took care of our children, endured my long periods of detachment from our family, accompanied me to classes and the dissertation defense, and never lost faith in me. Thanks for always listening when I needed it, and for encouraging me along every step of the way to pursue my dreams. I will always love you.

I could not have completed this arduous task without my friend Dr. Lynn Barolet. In addition to her friendship, which I treasure, I am also deeply grateful for her insights and emotional support. Her encouragement and thoughtful editing has been essential throughout this project.

I am deeply grateful to the three women participants for their willingness to candidly share their life stories, and for allowing me to probe the depths of their experience raising

multiracial children. Thank you for allowing me into your lives and sharing your experiences with the rest of the world. Your personal stories are the highlight of this endeavor. This study would not exist without the three of you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study was informed by critical race feminist thought and framed by a qualitative inquiry. Participants were three women of color born and raised outside the United States. Oral history as research methodology was used to capture the personal knowledge of these three women as I sought to understand why they chose a particular race indicator for their multiracial children; how it impacted their own racial identity; and what impacts it had on their children's educational experience.

Researchers using the critical race feminist framework often use narrative or story-telling to assemble their data. As I collected the stories and oral representations of this study's participants, I used oral history methods to describe the history of their lived experiences with racism and sexism. I also focused on participants' perceptions of themselves and their multiracial children, and in doing so I derived a number of themes from the data amassed.

After examining the transcript of the participants' interviews, I constructed a narrative that helped to locate the three participants' lived experiences. These three women's accounts revealed how different aspects of sexism, racism, heritage pride, and racial invisibility have been a part of their lives.

Multiracial Individuals in the United States

The racial landscape in the United States is rapidly changing and as a result, the concept of race might no longer be regarded as a clearly defined category. With this change, comes the realization that the multiracial population in the United States appears to be on the rise; nonetheless, because of unreasonable monoracial assumptions, attitudes and stereotypes in United States culture, there is a lack of significant studies or projections on multiracial

individuals. In writing about the obstacles faced by these multiracial individuals, Knaus (2002) claims that for many of these mixed-race people in the United States, life is normally spent on the margins of race, a sometimes invisible border separating their lives from the life experiences of monoracial people. Knaus (2002) goes on to warn us that this monoracial view is unmistakably a naïve paradigm that simply does not make room for multiracial individuals and their experiences.

In the context of education this reality is not very different. According to Francis Wardle (2000) many schools have race- and ethnic-specific student groups, yet individuals of mixed-race and mixed-ethnic backgrounds are persistently overlooked by this monoracial emphasis. To make matters worse, according to Wardle (2000), we do not have an accurate count of multiracial and multiethnic students in our schools, simply because we have no agreed-on definition for these children's racial identity.

In light of these reflections and based on my own experience as a woman of color mothering multiracial children, I would like to present the guiding research question for this study: What factors have influenced the decisions of mothers of multiracial children's to choose a particular racial indicator for their children, and how has this choice impacted the educational experience of their children in the Sumter County School District?

Although I have always been aware of the difficulties in defining my own racial identity, the desire to investigate racial identity frameworks arose when I became a mother of multiracial children who attended public school in Sumter County. Also, I chose this inquiry topic because of my own personal journey as a child of a mixed-race family, living in a mixed race marriage,

having mixed race children and living in voluntary exile from my native homeland. I would have to admit that in U.S. culture this reality often leaves me with a sense of not fitting into a specific racial group or having a sense of collective identity, due to a persistent paradigm that time and again, declines to grant multiracial people the option of multiple allegiances and multiple agencies. As I come to grips with these racial identity challenges – I am also reminded of other experiences that I have had that opened my eyes to racial identity issues such as one I had in Brazil.

During the summer of 2006, my family and I traveled to Brazil to visit family and friends and to further expose my sons Matthew and Nathan to my background culture. One of my plans that summer was for my sons to visit a Brazilian school for a day or two. To my surprise, they not only agreed to visit the school, but decided to attend class every day while we were in Brazil – giving them a privileged perspective of Brazilian culture.

On their first week of school, I decided to accompany them, and as we sat in their classroom observing the class, my son Nathan asked, "Mom, where are the other people?" Puzzled, I asked what other people he meant. He responded, "The White people and the Black people. I do not see anyone really White or really Black. They seem to be all mixed-up. you know how in the United States people are either White or Black?" As I struggled with my ineptness to answer his question, I realized that indeed that group of children and teachers in Brazil did not fit the perceived bipolar Black and White divisions of the U.S. demographics that my son knew all too well.

This framework of reasoning is also clearly stated by Wardle and Cruz-Jensen (2004) as they hold that in Brazil, there is no argument about identity development of mixed ethnic/race children, simply because the majority of people and children in Brazil are of mixed heritage, and the Brazilian government recognizes them as such. Wardle and Cruz-Jensen (2004) remind us that in fact "in Brazil children do not sit together by race or ethnicity in the cafeteria; there is no discussion about whether playing in the band, joining the soccer team, or playing golf is a Black thing, White thing, or Asian thing; or whether someone is "acting White" or "acting Black" (p. 103). Consequently, as I reflected on my son's questions and on Wardle and Cruz-Jensen's (2004) writing, I started to wonder what particular racial group my children would identify – for both my sons often pass for White – and what was their perception of my racial identity.

Because I am a Brazilian that fits Nathan's (my son) characterization of "mixed-up people" that live in the U.S., I also began to reflect on my own racial identity in the framework of United States culture. What am I? Black, White, Hispanic? In the U.S. context, I am none of these. At the time, I thought to myself, I am – as Tiger Woods would say – "a citizen of the world." And as such should I claim agency for all my ethnic backgrounds? Or should I claim allegiance to one specific group for the sake of agency and representation? As I pondered this reflection, memories of racial identity issues crowded my mind in search of an adequate answer.

For example, I recalled the occasion when a school secretary tried to describe me to another person on the phone. She looked at me from head to toe and mumbled words such as, "she is Bla… no she is Mexi… no, she is…" and in frustration, she mumbled, "I don't know what she is, but she is wearing a green blouse and black pants." In that circumstance it was a lot

easier to be depicted by the color of my clothing than by the color of my skin in combination with my racial characteristics. Somehow, I felt a mix of privilege and apprehension, for both these experiences made me feel equally hindered – due to the lack of ethnic agency – and empowered, for my racial heritage allows me to mingle with more than one ethnic group and thus, "choose" which group to have allegiance.

What? I do not fit any specific ethnic definition in the United States context? That is opportune in the sense that it enables me to cross demographic boundaries – and I have done it repeatedly, because time and again most people in the United States have difficulties determining my ethnic identity. But my struggle comes with a certain need to have a specific ethnic agency, power and representation as I negotiate everyday life. For example, throughout my life I have been consistently involved in social justice activism. However here in the United States, when it comes to deciding on what type of cultural and racial struggles I should get involved, I often feel inadequate and wonder if I should speak for a group that I might not represent or a group that might not acknowledge my genuine allegiance.

These difficulties in pinning down my racial location have become even more obvious as I observe my sons' social bonding experiences – as they try to have their racial identities needs met – within this perceived monoracial context of the United States' public schools. And in these circumstances, although my sons have a diverse group of friends, they are often labeled White by school officials, their friends and their friends' parents. Occasionally, one of their friends asks about my sons' racial identity. However, when asked about their racial identity, both Matthew

and Nathan (my sons) often have difficulties identifying their own racial identity. Nonetheless, they seem to feel comfortable crossing the boundaries of race to socialize and make friends.

Exploring Adequate Racial Identity

As I examine these studies and judge them against my own multiethnic background, I have learned to reflect on the fact that my sons and I do not fit any specific monoracial racial definition. And it is good in a sense that it enables us to cross demographic boundaries – and we have done so repeatedly – with relative ease. But again, the struggle comes with a certain need to have a specific ethnic agency, power and representation. For example, Chandra Mohanty (2003) argues that multiethnic people need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them for such borders suggests both containment and safety. When it comes to having a sense of belonging to a particular community, however, Giroux and McLaren (1994) posits that central to this struggle is the rethinking and rewriting of differences in relation to wider questions of membership, community, and social responsibility. Does the fact that I do not fit any particular self-contained ethnic group hinder me or my children from claiming individual ethnic agency in the context of the United States' culture?

As I elaborate on this question I also reflect on the fact that in the context of United States culture and feminism, I have felt neither included nor rejected; thus, I do not feel that I belong to either White or Black feminist struggles. However, one would assume that because I am a Latina, I would find solace in the Chicana feminist movement, but I also feel that there is some degree of universalizing by Chicana feminism. In fact, although I am deep-seated in a Hispanic community, I do not feel that I am defined by it. Therefore, I feel that my needs for

representation and regard as a mother of multiracial children, woman and scholar, are different and perhaps not met in the same level as it would be for Chicana and Hispanic women.

Nonetheless, at times I feel that if feminist border demarcations are indistinct we might risk losing our individual characteristics. But I also fear that insisting too much on defining feminism's border demarcations could be counterproductive to building coalitions that would strengthen feminist movements across the demographics. However, we must ask ourselves some pertinent questions: Who are the gatekeepers of these borders demarcations? What is the end result of keeping the borders closed? Does it protect individual characteristics and legitimize race and gender agency? Or does it help to keep patriarchy strong by dividing the power of organization of the diverse feminist movements? Would crossing feminist divides promote solidarity among women?

Lorde (1984) contends that "as women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and skepticism rather than as forces for change" (p. 112). Mohanty, (2003) adds to this conversation by positing that, although it is important to recognize our individualities, it is equally important that we build coalitions that would fight against women's oppression. On the contrary, writers such as Davenport (1984) challenges this assumption because, in her view, White feminists still perceive women of Color as the "other" based on a menial or sexual image: "as sensual, but less cerebral; more interesting, perhaps, but less intellectual; and more oppressed, but less political than they are (p. 85)." She then contends that it has always been difficult to believe that White women will transcend color to make a political pact with the women of Color, for any reason. , Lorde (1984) stands with

Davenport (1984) in explaining that essentially, without community there is no room for liberation. However, Lorde (1984) also explains that cultivating this sense of community does not mean ignoring our differences, or pretending that these differences do not exist.

In light of these reflections and based on my own experience, I studied the self-characterization of three other women who also dealt with the issue of choosing a race for their multiracial children attending school in a monoracial context in the Sumter County Schools district. What does it mean to raise multiracial children attending public school in Sumter County – a county that has a history of racial struggles? In order to answer this question I will looked into the possibility that these women might also have learned to examine the hopes and obstacles they face as they consider racial socialization factors that would impact the learning environment of their children.

But, most importantly, participants were asked to discuss their views on what has influenced their decision to choose a particular racial indicator for their children. I also inquired about the distinctiveness of their lives as mothers who have a personal understanding of the multiracial experience in the United States cultural context – which often acknowledges only one race per person – and the difficulties they face in placing their children within the stage configured by present monoracial models of racial identity.

Particular attention was given to the process of reconciling gender discrimination, languages, cultures, and multiple-identities, and how these women socially construct and re-construct their cultural identity through cross-cultural experiences as they network with and negotiate cultural discrepancies that impact their everyday life and the educational experience of

their children. Although, this study may not have accounted for all nuances of the issues face by mothers of multiracial children, it has attempted to capture the complexity of these women's personal experience as members of the group in question.

Educational Significance of the Study

The worthiness of this study lies in the fact that it will help to increase the awareness of educators supporting struggles against sexism, prejudice and stereotypes toward multiracial students. Hopefully, this increased awareness will help foster gender and culturally responsive teaching. Furthermore, this study might increase the interest of other mothers of multiracial children attending Sumter County Schools in exploring their own roots, their sense of self, their works, as well as the increased critical awareness of their contributions to their children's education and their communities. This awareness will help educators and stakeholders to better understand the differences between monoracial issues and other issues faced by multiracial children. As a result this awareness could prompt schools to provide a supportive community that affirms multiracialism, and help these children and their families to find ways to gain empowerment. This renewed empowerment in turn could help to transform the monoracial paradigm in our schools and communities.

Moreover, my choice of a focus for this study was a reflection of my predispositions concerning how I view multiracial individuals. In addition, my overall perception of this study was influenced by my own circumstance as a multiracial woman, my involvement in a mixed-race relationship, and the fact that I am a mother of mixed-race children.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will review critical areas of literature and research relevant to multiracial identity, race/racism and gender/sexism, seeking to understand and expand the current knowledge about identity and social location of multiracial/multiethnic individuals, particularly as gender and race intersect.

The racial landscape in the United States is rapidly changing and as a result, the perspective on race might no longer be regarded as a hemmed in category. Nonetheless, because of the limiting nature of monoracial postulations in U.S. culture, there is a lack of comprehensive studies or projections on multiracial people. However, in order to sustain the argument that the multiracial population is growing, we would have to assume that purely defined races exist, and that race is a biological construct. Not so, argue some researchers. For instance, in discussing studies focused on multiracial/multiethnic individuals, Renn (2004) warns that, if we are going to distinguish "mixed-race" people as a category deserving of scholarly attention, we ought to assume two conditions: first, that there are "pure" races to begin with, and second, that there are people who are not "mixed race."

Some researchers argue that in fact racial divide has no scientific foundation, because race is nothing but a social construct. For example, Wallace (2004) contends that "race and the resulting five-race framework frequently used in the United States is by and large, understood by researchers to be a social construct with no basis in science," (p. x). Wing (2003) comes into this

conversation by maintaining that one significant theme in critical race theories is known as the social construction thesis, which supports the argument that biological races do not exist, as recent science has unmistakably shown. “There is more genetic difference within so-called races than between them. Instead, races have been socially constructed and the legal system reifies that construction, privileging some races over others” (p. 5).

In light of this argument, is it possible to view race as a fixed scheme that does not consent to a variety of racial construct? Reich (2002) contends, and I concur, that in reality, we need to be aware of the fact that race is not a rigid system of categorization, but rather a fluid process of strategy and construction. Reich (2002) then reminds us that racial identity and racial socialization approaches are subjectively constructed and that race operates not only between families and society, but also between family members.

In light of this argument, one important question remains: Can we assume that even though race does not have a biological significance, does it have a social significance in US society? Wallace (2004) contends that “race does matter in United States society and it plays out at the personal, social, and institutional levels, including in schools” (p. x). This argument, then leads us to assume that the understanding of the social construction of “race” in the U.S. is crucial to the understanding of the impact of racial divide in our society. Frankenberg (1993) asserts, the way people perceive us and the way we perceive one another, influences our lives and it is contingent on how social groups perceive and recognize where a particular race is located in our society.

Racism as a Factor in the U.S. Society

It should be no surprise that the United States' culture continues to struggle with racism, since racial discrimination still remains a central feature of the twenty first century, and one of the most challenging issues confronting its society. Advancement towards tolerance of individuals of color has been extremely time-consuming and plagued by frequent setbacks.

Excessive inequalities persist in all levels of our society, since dominant groups still make use of their clout and authority to impose prejudices and to prevent oppressed racial groups from having access to power. Structural racism has been a triggering factor in social discrimination and as has blemished much of American history. Therefore; West (1999) argues that, in order for us to attain a fully functional multiracial society, we must have a sense of history and open, truthful dialogue. Delgado (1993) stands with West (1999) in confirming that racism clearly contributes to a class system, in which the United States' society has a vital interest in controlling or stifling, for racism impacts the career prospects, social mobility, and interracial contacts of minority group members. As a result, this class system works to prevent people of color from moving into economically advantageous positions. When racist measures and attitudes stop people of color from contributing their talents to the social order because they are often dispirited or angry, then society as a whole loses, (Delgado 1993). Racism works to discriminate against ethnic minorities and to perpetuate white privilege, and it must end if we wish to have a just and reasonable society.

Hooks (2003), while discussing racial inequalities and injustice endured by people of color, contends that most people in the United States oppose blatant acts of racism, for people in

United States allegedly want to see an end to racism and racial discrimination. “Nonetheless, there is clearly a fundamental gap between theory and practice” (p. 28). With this argument in mind, what can be done to keep racially oppressed individuals from giving up on the pursuit to end or lessen the power grasp of racism? Delgado (2001) responds by affirming that researchers, practitioners and students continue the search for the means to successfully analyze and confront the brunt of race and racism in the U.S. society. Consequently standpoint frameworks such as critical race feminism and critical race theory can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly influence social structures, practices and discourses. Standpoint frameworks tackle the social construct of race by examining the ideology of racism.

However when racism is only one factor of discrimination endured by certain individuals, then we must confront the topic of prejudice from a much more challenging perspective, that of discriminatory intersection. Delgado (2005) notes that we need to be attentive to the fact that racism and its intersections with other forms of subordination shape the experiences of people of color very differently than Whites. This argument leads us to explore gendered and racialized perceptions of discrimination.

Gender as a Determinant Factor

Although efforts to address gender inequalities have improved significantly in the United States in the last decades, gender discrimination and the cultural forces that sustain it, is still rampant in the U.S. society. Because women are still relegated to second class citizens, gender subjugation is tolerated and accepted on many fronts. Weiler (1988) reminds us that all women

are to some extent oppressed by sexism, for they are constantly aware of their identity as women in a way that men seldom are as men. Beasley (1999) echoes, but then expands on this argument by claiming that feminist writers regularly point out that mainstream social and political thought has, either explicitly or implicitly accepted and confirmed women's subordinate position in social and political life. And obviously, this discussion gained increased interest in 2008 since it was called the year of the woman in American politics – with Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin running for high stake political positions – and as a result, gender was a constant on the political and social landscape.

According to Beasley (1999), feminists argue that mainstream theory largely takes for granted women's subordination and assumes that it is not a centrally significant topic of political thinking. I would go so far as to say that perhaps the issue of gender subordination is presumed to be less significant because of a persistent social structure in which women is relegated to a subordinate role on many fronts. But according to hooks (2000), what is important to note is that under capitalism, patriarchy is structured in such a way that sexism curbs women's behavior in some spheres even as freedom from limitations is tolerated in other areas. Hooks (2000) adds that, when race and racism are the focus of public debate, the voices that we hear most frequently are unmistakably male. Consequently, this cultural refusal to listen to and validate the power of women speaking about politics of race and racism in the United States' society is seen as a direct reflection of a long tradition of sexist and racist views. This sexist views in turn, always characterized race and racism as male territory, in which women of color do not really fit in, (Hooks, 2000).

This attitude is clearly stated in hooks' (1984) assertion that this tradition leads women to see reality from the outside in and from the inside out which as a result leads women to focus on the center as well as the margin. This brief reflection on race/racism and gender/sexism then leads us to explore the intersection of gender and race.

Gender and Race Intersection

As gender and race intersect in the lives of women of color, these multiple characteristics have an even greater impact on their experiences in society in general. Because women of color frequently find themselves in situations in which they have to consistently negotiate two facets of their identity – gender and race. Wing (2003), points out that, according to every social indicator, women of color remain stuck at the bottom of American society.

Additionally, writers such as Lorde (1984) claim that in fact, as a group, women of color are by far the lowest paid wage earners in the United States. As a matter of fact, according to Lorde (1984), whether they are African American, Latina, Asian, or Native American, women of color have not been able to effectively integrate into the mainstream, much less the upper echelons, of American economic, political, social, or educational life.

Hooks (1995) argues that until progressive women and men engaged in anti-racist, anti-sexist work become aware of the fact that devaluation of Black womanhood undermines these struggles neither movement can press forward. Hooks (1995) also adds that "all too often progressive White women and men who are committed to a feminist vision fall prey to liberal sentimental overvaluing of Black male pain in ways that lead them to accept sexist behavior from this group that they would vigorously challenge in interactions with White peers" (p.85).

And with that in mind, next I examine a framework that explores these important aspects and social intersections of women of color.

Study Framework: Critical Race Feminism

As mentioned above the intersection of race/racism and gender/sexism informed this inquiry. Therefore, this study was guided by critical race feminism – a framework that is characterized by its analysis of the interconnection of race/racism with gender/sexism and "other" – to frame a qualitative study. So here I begin with a brief introduction to the history of critical race feminism.

Although the genesis of critical race feminism (CRF) is deeply rooted in the history of legal studies, critical race feminism presents a philosophy that works well to examine the intersection of race/racism with gender/sexism and "other" as well. While explaining the origin of critical race theory, Daneshpour (2004), reveals that United States' legal scholars developed critical race theory during the 1980s as a response to the lack of critical analysis in existing civil rights scholarship and the lack of race consciousness in the well-known critical legal studies movement, as it offers an alternative interpretation of history from the standpoint of minorities' experiences.

Meanwhile, critical race feminist theory surfaced from the broader perspective of critical race theory as a result of the historical exclusion of racial/ethnic women scholars not only by their male peers but also by White feminist scholars. In fact, many scholars insisted that critical race theorists move past the "single-axis" analysis of racial subjugation and identity and instead focus on intersectional or multidimensional frameworks of analysis. Other scholars confronted

the “Black/White paradigm” of critical race theory and urged theorists to conduct multiracial analyses of racial disparity (Hutchinson, 2005).

Wing (2003) for her part writes that critical race feminism has become possible because a symbolic group of women of color became recipients of affirmative action, beginning in the late 1960s, and consequently, managed to trickle up into the legal profession and, eventually, into the legal academy. As result, some women of color became aware of the fact that certain perspectives presented in critical race theory literature may have implied that women of color’s experiences were similar to those of men of color. But, in fact, the challenges faced by women of color can never be fully understood by centering on either race or gender separately.

Accordingly, Wing (2003) points out that the experience of men of color differs significantly from that of women of color, which consequently makes critical race feminism an intervention movement within critical race theory. Wing (1999) asserts that critical race feminism focuses on the numerous factors affecting the oppression of, and prejudice against, women of color. Moreover, Wing (2003) expands on this issue by explaining that she uses the term “multiplicative identity” to describe the concept that women of color are not simply “White women” plus color or “men of color” plus gender. “Instead, their identity must be multiplied together to create a holistic (One) when analyzing the nature of the discrimination against them” (p. 7).However, what finally becomes the central aim of critical race feminism is the emphasis on the legal concerns of a significant group of people – those who are both women and members of today’s racial/ethnic minorities, as well as disproportionally poor (Wing 2003).

Furthermore, echoing many other women of color, Wing (2003) posits that it is important to note that critical race feminism also acknowledges that mainstream feminism has paid insufficient attention to how White supremacy has subjugated women of color, and that not only White men but also White women are guilty of such subjugation. However, it is important to note that regardless of the argument that conventional feminism overlooks the reality of women of color, some critical race feminism authors still draw on a variety of prominent threads in feminism that may have significance for their analysis, such as notions of formal equality, dominance/inequality, socialism, hedonic feminism, pragmatic feminism, radical feminism, and liberal feminism (Wing, 2003).

Nonetheless, not all researchers agree with the perspective of standpoint theories such as critical race feminism. For instance, Blume, De Reus, & Few (2004), assert that critics of critical race theory and critical race feminism contend that the standpoint theories and identity politics that these theories bring into play, are essentialist and lead to false generalization In addition to being constrictive in nature and difficult to apply methodologically. Yet these authors respond to critics by affirming that in reality, multicultural feminism and critical race feminism actually go beyond identity politics by engaging scholars in an analysis of the politics of location and intersectionality.

Nevertheless, it is fundamentally important to be aware that, even if critical race feminism offers a critique of the feminist concept that there is an essential female voice, it is still possible to stumble on essentialist views within the critical race feminism movement, as supporters of this framework many times find themselves talking about Black women or Asian

women as if there were an essential voice for these groups (Wing, 2003). But in the end it is important to understand that the critical race feminist framework still accentuates the situation of women of color, whose lives may not conform to an essentialist norm.

Moreover, Crenshaw (1993), explains that, in fact, critical race feminists are anti-essentialists and their legal writings reflect the multiplicity of women's identities. Blume, De Reus, & Few (2004), argue that, standpoint theories imply that social and epistemic location influences how individuals and groups find the significance of identity and drum up strategies to negotiate the politics of difference. For this reason, according to Wing (2003), critical race feminism can turn out to be an inspiration to those around us, asserting that something can be done to lessen the predicament of women of color.

Women and their multiracial families are distinctively affected by racial and gender dynamics in the United States society; therefore, here I will not only examine ways in which critical race feminism benefits from studies on multiracial individuals, but I will also explore how the critical race feminist framework benefits the study of these individuals.

How can critical race feminism affect social choices made by multiracial families? Daneshpour (2004) argues that studies of family policy in particular could profit from critical race feminist theory as a guiding theoretical framework for explaining the choices that racial/ethnic families make in regard to social and legal policies.

Because of this characterization, critical race feminism is fundamentally important in explaining the causes of invisibility of multiracial individuals and consequently, situating these individuals within the context of race and gender intersections and discrimination. And in doing

so, critical race feminist thought offers a unique feminist epistemology as it argues for the concept of social diversity and multiplicity within the feminist movement in the United States.

How can critical race feminism cultivate awareness of race and gender issues that will concientisize people about the subjugation of women of color and their multiracial children? Hua (2003) points out that the significance of critical race feminism lies in the fact that it reclaims feminism by speaking of racism, colonialism and neocolonialism, in order to alter the means of emancipation. Besides, what radical changes in the feminist movement will endorsing the views of critical race feminism bring about? Hua (2003) contends that radical changes are possible because critical race feminism endorses the study of the racialization of womanhood, and explores womanhood, as it looks at how women of color are "othered" and oppressed by various brutal histories such as slavery, colonization, genocide, lynching, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and globalized labor. Thus, these insights on critical race feminism reveal how my narrative study – of three women of color born outside of the United States, and mothers of multiethnic/multiracial children – would benefit from this framework of reasoning, due to critical race feminism's construct that includes researchers of mixed-race feminism. And also due to its engagement with the dialogue about the inclusion/exclusion of women of color within the feminist movement.

Issues of Ethnic Identity

With that in mind, this literature review is presented through the following thematic construct: Issues of ethnic identity and membership of multiracial individuals have been disproportionately underrepresented in scholarly literature, because as critical race feminists'

reflections elucidate, the process of racial and gender marginalization has been explored through field research predominantly addressing either gender or racial issues separately.

Thus, in the context of this argument, my work examined the writings of scholars such as Francis Wardle, Marta Cruz-Janzen (2004) and Maria Root (1996a, 1996b), who have studied the developmental needs of multiracial and multiethnic students, multidimensional identities, ethnic identity and membership of multiracial individuals. Furthermore, I drew extensively on critical race feminism, but I also included the writings of feminist scholars such as Chandra Mohanty (2003), in which she argues for a feminist movement that envisions transformation and social justice work across lines of demarcation and division of nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions and disabilities. I also included writings by bell hooks (1984, 1994, 1995, 2000, & 2003) as she explains how important it is that the feminist movement in the United States understand sexism, the intersection of race and gender and how this combination shapes discrimination against women of color.

Consequently, as I explored studies that question the inclusion and recognition of subjectivity of all women – such as Mohanty (2003) and her emphasis on cross-cultural feminism and the production of knowledge; bell hooks (1984, 1995, 2000 & 2003) and her concern for the interconnectivity of race, class and gender and their impact on the continuation of oppression for women of color – I begin to question my own concept of subjugation in the context of gender and race. And it is in this context that Mohanty (2003) suggests that the issue of "subjectivity represents a realization of the fact that who we are, how we act, what we think, and what stories we tell become more understandable within an epistemological framework that

begins by recognizing existing hegemonic histories" (p. 195). With that in mind, this next section presents the literature directly related to issues of ethnic and gender identity struggles faced by multiethnic individuals, more specifically women of color and their multiracial children.

Designating Racial Identity of Multiracial Children

Many recent national studies have explored the struggles faced by multiracial individuals as they grapple with racial identity issues in a country where race and gender still matter as an axis through which society still fractures. Hence, this review explored the literature on approaches to designate the racial identity of multiracial children; it reviewed studies on ethnic identity theory; it gave an overview on racialized boundaries and finally, examined the politics of education and language.

According to Erikson (1968), identity development is a never-ending process. However, this never-ending process proves to be especially true for multiracial children because one problem that children of multiracial parents frequently face is deciding which racial group to have allegiance, and how to identify with a specific group that shares their heritage.

Wardle (1999) asks if parents were asked to declare one race for their children which race should they choose? Would they opt for the race that they bear a resemblance to? Or should the parents choose the race that would benefit them the most? Or perhaps they should choose the race that is considered the underdog? Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) respond by explaining that a multiethnic/multiracial child with a healthy identity would not be concerned about embracing and celebrating her or his entire heritage, because she or he is comfortable and at ease with his or her total family and cultural background, and is able to flexibly move between single-race

groups. These authors contend, and I concur, that the multiethnic and multiracial child does not need to put down, nullify, or demean any part of her or his heritage to feel good about her or his racial identity.

In a study about racial designation and racial boundaries, Brunsma (2005) presents the issues of interracial families and the racial identification of mixed-race children, by exploring the structure of parental racial designation of mixed-race children. In this study Brunsma (2005) adds to other researchers' argument that, multiracial families are constantly trying to navigate a convoluted, "changing" racial landscape where issues of multiraciality are now discussed and debated. And evidently where race and racism is denounced and supposedly diminished. Where, in the end, race still matters as an axis through which commodities, services, opportunities and life chances are distributed unjustly to members of this same society.

In trying to take into consideration the intricate construct that depicts multiracial individuals, Brunsma (2005) poses the following question: "given the complex interplay of class-based, racial and gendered structures that contribute to the ever-morphing racial formations and racial projects occurring at the cultural, political, as well as the interactional and individual level, how do interracial couples (or couples socializing mixed-race children) racially identify their children" (p. 1135)? The answer to this question, according to Brunsma (2005), is that there is sufficient evidence within this study that may indicate that parents of multiracial children are moving away from minority status through racial labeling and towards "multiracial" and "white" movements that are predicated upon gender, and class.

This could, in fact, be the direct result of significant influences of parental/familial socioeconomic status on this general movement away from minority designation for mixed-race children. But how does racial designation work when taking the class and minority-minority mixtures issue into consideration? Brunsma's findings point out that in the case of minority-minority combinations, parents will opt for the racial label that is the least negatively valued in American society. For parents of minority mixed-race children, Brunsma states, "one may expect parents from higher socioeconomic status to identify their mixed-race children with the designation carrying the least "negative valuation" (p. 1135).

In a study about the development of racial identity for school children of Black/White biracial heritage, Kerwin et al. (1993) revealed that racial labeling is a major source of concern for both parents and their multiracial children, because parents of these children do not feel that their children should submit to the labels imposed by society. Nonetheless, Brunsma (2005) explains that there is a strong indication that the racial landscape of organizational contexts and social networks, affects the ways in which multiracial individuals will self-identify, which in turn should also affect the parental designations of their multiracial children. In addition, the parental designation is also contingent on the racial compositions of their schools. For instance, a predominately minority school context will augment the likelihood that parents of these mixed-race children will identify their children with the minority designation.

Could heritage language contexts influence the racial designation of multiracial children? The results of Brunsma's (2005) study indicate that language could, in fact, affect the racial designation of multiracial children, because for some of these interracial families, language is

fundamentally important for the development of group affiliation (i.e., Hispanics and the Spanish language). “Home language usage may have an impact on the identification of these mixed-race children, leading to the possibility that in households where a non-English language is predominately spoken, parents of mixed-race children will be more likely to identify these children with the minority status” (p. 1135).

Brunsma (2005) concludes by suggesting that exploring and beginning to comprehend the complex ways in which adult guardians racially categorize mixed-race children on an institutional survey (e.g., related to their education – in school) helps to shed light on the complexities inherent in race dealings, processes of racialization, the configuration of racial stratification, and the enigmatic relationship between racial identity and racial identification. Though the number of cases in each biological mixed-race combination vary widely, it is clear that mixed-race children live in a variety of households with varying racial parentage and are entrenched within a variety of arrangements (Brunsma, 2005). Nonetheless, the results of Brunsma, (2005) study may indicate a trend in which the parents of these multiracial children are embracing a racial designation practice that stays away from minority status through racial labeling and moves towards “multiracial” and “White” – movements that are predicated upon gender, class and context.

In contrast, Wardle and Cruz-Janzen (2004), contend that, in fact what we see time and again is that the minority parent in the relationship often opts for the child to be raised with the minority marker, whereas the parent of lowest status insists on the child being raised with her or his racial identity. In judging one approach against the other, is there a way to have a more

balanced approach between these two sides of this argument? Wardle (1999) contends that it is possible to recognize and celebrate one's entire racial heritage. In fact, Wardle (1999) goes so far as to claim that the multiracial movement in the United States is largely based on the assertion that it is positive and affirming to recognize and celebrate one's entire racial and ethnic identity, non-White as well as White.

Kerwin et al. (1993), while discussing racial classification in multiracial households, explain that the racial classification of a child from a multiracial family differs very little from single race parents. Adding to this discussion, in a study about raising biracial children Rockquemore and Laszloffy, (2005) draw on the results of their research to claim that a new model of racial identity for multiracial children is necessary. Rockquemore and Laszloffy, (2005) do more than advocate for a new model. They suggest that this new model should place special emphasis on the interaction between structural, psychological, and relational factors that undeniably affect the identity development of multiracial individuals. This new model according to Rockquemore and Laszloffy, (2005) would in turn, work to embrace the multiple ways that mixed-race people racially self-identify and to reassure that no one racial identity is any better or more important than another.

Crossing the Border Lines of Race to Form Families

"If this world is going to come together,

it's inevitable that the races

will mix and find harmony."

(Matthew Haramut)

In understanding the ways multiracial individuals identify themselves, we must first consider relationships that result from individuals crossing racial boundaries to form a multiracial family. Although, all studies examined here are to some extent associated with individuals crossing the racial boundaries to start a family, these next two studies illustrate particularly the way these individuals struggle to be accepted, not only by their own racial kin, but also in their partner's racial context and their communities.

In these two studies that follow, both Walsh (2005) and Karis (2000) explore issues related to individuals that chose to form families across racial lines. Karis (2000) writes about the identity of White mothers of multiracial children, while Walsh (2005), writes about the restructuring of racial identity of individuals that formed families across the color line. Walsh (2005), points out that the color line is very real in the day to day experiences of those who have opted to form multiracial families, because these individuals are for the most part aware of and susceptible to the "border patrolling" stares and remarks that characterize their families as "unusual" or outside the norm. Therefore, these multiracial families continue to be the subject of discrimination since they still face stares, surprised looks of strangers and constant questions about how they are related to each other.

In support of this view, Karis (2000), reveals that almost every woman she interviewed in her study, had specific language for talking about shifts in racial identity that were credited to experiences as a wife and/or mother in a multiracial family. For example, the women used metaphors such as being a spy, disguised as typical White person, being trapped in a White

woman's body, being White with a Black soul, being interracial, and being a White woman in a Multicultural family.

Further, Walsh (2005) points out that in reality, when confronted with racial questions most of those living in multiracial families choose to dodge, shun, or evade race talk all together. Walsh (2005) explains that the findings of her study reveal how those who live on the color line keenly create and recreate race and racial categories. In other words, categories of race are made to appear unbending and real although they are simply socially constructed.

Both Walsh (2005) and Karis (2000) also addressed the issue of gender in these studies. Karis (2000) asserted that racial identity constructions in her study were shaped by class and gender, with different situations and relationships eliciting shifting articulations of White racialness. Walsh (2005) argues that our society still remains structured by race and gender, and interracial couples live their lives in the social milieu of family and community relations where racial prospect shape ideas about womanhood and manhood.

Walsh (2005) claims that there is evident gender discrepancy in the experience of racial identity, since most of the White women she interviewed in her study expressed feelings of no longer having a White consciousness, but being mistaken by other Whites. These White women often described fatigue at having to keep up their guard among Whites who do not know of their Black families for fear of unkind remarks. Walsh (2005) adds that Black women, aware of race expectations for their behavior, discussed strategies to secure their responsibility, and Black men often revealed their awareness that marriage to a White woman raised questions about their racial authenticity.

Karis (2000) writes that the social location of a White woman in an interracial relationship, or the White mother of children of color impacted the particular ways in which White racialness got constructed. Consequently, according to Karis (2000), for White women in a racially mixed family, whiteness loses some of its fundamental status as women are faced with situations in which they no longer have the option to ignore race. This loss of status is due in part to the fact that in public, women are visible as Whites in ways that are different than what is experienced in all-White families. Therefore, because these women see the impact of racism on the people they love, their partners and children, issues of race and racism become greatly relevant in their lives. Karis (2000) adds that within the context of raising children in Multiracial families, "White women articulate, resist and recreate White racial identities, and influence the development of their children's racial identities" (p.226). Karis (2000) then concludes that White mothers in multiracial families confront the challenge of rearing children within the context of differing principles of acceptability, a position that can lead to challenging dominant cultural or racial norm, embracing Black communities' standards, or drawing on White racial privilege.

Mothering Multiracial Children

In examining studies such as these two above, one is prompted to presume that mixed-race individuals and their families still face distinctive challenges to gain broader acceptance of their racial heritage in a culture that still struggles with issues of racism. Therefore it is important to examine the numerous factors that influence the racial labeling of these individuals. Thus, here I will examine a few studies that address factors affecting the racial designation of mixed-race children.

For instance, in a study about issues of racial disparity in the lives of adolescent women who are mothers of multiracial children, Haines (1998), looked at a number of young women's experiences with race and some of the dynamics that have affected their racial identity, such as the influence of friendships, neighborhoods, parents and family. Haines (1998) examined their involvement in interracial relationships; their justifications as to why they date cross-racially; the repercussion this has in terms of how these young mothers characterize themselves, and the problems and conflicts they have encountered because of their choice of partners.

This study also connected these young women's experiences of race to their roles as parents; how they identify their children, and anticipate the identity conflicts and encounters with racism their children may face in the future. A diverse interview sample consisting of White, Asian, Native, and multiracial/multiethnic women made possible a broad, comparative perspective on how young women experience their racial identity and racial differences within the context of an intimate relationship. The results of this study suggest that while there are increased possibilities for bridges across racial borders within young interracial families, these relationships are not immune from racial tensions.

White Mothers of Multiracial Children

In a study about White mothers of biracial children, Johnson (2004) writes about her own experience as a White mother of biracial children. Johnson (2004) affirms that she was feeling and experiencing many of the similar issues and events as many other mothers of biracial children. She adds that she frequently experienced prejudice, whether she was with her children or without them. Johnson (2004) complained that she often endured discrimination and racism in

public as well as in private places such as home and her graduate school. Moreover, Johnson (2004) noted that in reality she faced daily prejudice in both White and Black communities when came to the racial background of her children.

Do experiences such as this one affect the way White mothers of multiracial children perceive their racial identity? Johnson (2004) responds by stating that in her case, she sensed that her racial identity altered when she was alone, as well as when she was with her children, and it also shifted when her awareness of prejudice aimed at her kids heightened, and when she was in the classroom. Johnson (2004) shared that, as she learned to analyze her experiences and her perspectives of race and racism, she often felt as if she was looking through a kaleidoscope. As a result these experiences have helped to shape her racial identity, which according to Johnson (2004), is actually constantly changing. Johnson (2004) says that as she views this symbolic kaleidoscope of her life, she questions what image is reflected when she looks in the mirror (p. 19).

For instance, when analyzing other people's perception of her children's racial indication, Johnson (2004) claims that she often speculates what other people might see as they view her in the company of her children, and what they perceive when they spot her children without her presence. The author goes on to say that as she turns this metaphoric kaleidoscope in one direction, she sees one picture, but as she turns it in the other direction the picture seems altered. And at times, Johnson (2004) claims, she sees no picture at all, as it becomes an obscure mass of color, indistinct and indecipherable.

In keeping with the theme of White mothers of Biracial children, O'Donoghue (2004) also looked at the uniqueness of the racial and ethnic identity of eleven White mothers who were married to Black [specifically African American] men and were raising biracial children. O'Donoghue (2004) found that through parenting their biracial children, the mothers had learned to understand their own racial identity and recognized White privilege and their own White identity. The findings of O'Donoghue (2004) study also found that these mothers' specific ethnic identity, as ethnic Whites, has not been passed on to their children. Mothers of multiracial children are seldom discussed in the literature. When they are mentioned in the scholarly context, they are by and large treated simply as heritage markers of their children, not as individuals who have an ethnic and racial identity of their own that will shape the family structure and the socialization of their children (O'Donoghue, 2004).

Racial Labeling

While building upon the previous works cited, the following writings illustrate the recent status of multiracial children's experiences in education, and other factors that influence racial indicators. For instance, while studying issues related to labeling of Multiracial children in Black intermarriage, Roth (2005) explains that education contributes to a complex understanding of race that permits individuals to confront social norms. She contends that those with higher education are prone to have a more profound knowledge of the history of group relations, and an ability to think outside the lines normally drawn by society. And consequently, according to Roth (2005), this denial of the social norm predicts that those with higher levels of education would be

more likely to opt for a race other than Black for their multiracial children and to consider "interracial identities" as a feasible alternative.

Furthermore Roth (2005) shows that how a family sees their multiracial child's race may have to do with the particular races of the mother and father. For example, in the case of a marriage combination that involves an Asian parent, the Asian surnames frequently reveal racial indication, and this may cause people to assume that a particular individual with an Asian surname might have an Asian heritage. But again, the same cannot be said for individuals who take the name of the Black parent, because Black surnames are less likely to disclose racial heritage (Roth, 2005). However, according to Roth's study, the very fact that a child's surname is usually taken from the father rather than the mother in the United States suggests a "patrilineal" influence in matters of identity that may shape the passing on of racial identity as well. This phenomenon is called "patrilineal identity transmission," according to Roth (2005).

Another factor observed by (Roth, 2005) that may impact the racial determination of multiracial children, is a phenomenon called "cultural conformity" which happens as result of a stronger connection to a particular racial group through exposure to aspects of that group's culture or heritage, which leads to a positive association with the group. Consequently, this cultural connection may shape racial identification. Hence, one way that exposure to a racial group's heritage can take place is through contact with extended family members. And in this case, physical proximity to extended relatives that live in the same household may have a greater impact on the choice of racial marker of the multiracial child. Furthermore, this study's findings convey that social context also plays a role in what racial alternatives are available or sought-

after. For instance, exposure to a racial group in a geographical area may lead to a positive association with that particular group. Thus, the predominance of a racial group may shape not only daily exposure, but also what identities are seen as desirable.

Moreover, if the parents have a major say while choosing their young children's racial indicator, this study indicates that the opposite might occur as these children grow older, because parent–child dynamics change as a child ages, and children who are old enough to have their own ideas about their identity may sway their parents' labeling decisions. Yet, Roth (2005) found other factors that played a part in the labeling process of multiracial children. Case in point, Black parents born overseas have different ways of dealing with race than those born in the United States, and consequently these parents are more likely to consider a White label to their children than native-born Black parents. Nonetheless, these findings suggest that as Black immigrants spend more time in the United States or adopt its understanding of race, this difference may reduce.

Children's Perception of Their Racial Identity

One of the most significant factors in the lives of mixed-race children is how they are labeled by their families, their communities, and how they choose their own labels. Root (1996a) posits that, for oppressed people, as many multiracial individuals consider themselves, labels are important vehicles for self-empowerment. One aspect of racial identity that troubles Multiracial children is the fact that people attempt to pigeonhole them into one racial identity. Thus, if given the choice to opt for a specific racial indicator which one would multiracial children choose for themselves? When studying fluidity and complexity of racial and ethnic identification in the

U.S., Perez (2006) found that in the case of a group of Hispanic adolescents, one fourth of them who identify as Hispanic in one setting fail to do so in the other, despite being asked nearly identical ethnic origin questions. Perez (2006) also established that while Hispanic parentage is found to be the most significant predictor of consistent identification, race, origin group status, and social integration play important roles.

Consistent with the research above, the findings of another study conducted by Talbot (2008) indicate that the process of racial self-labeling actually evolves with time, because as participants reflect on the racial labels that they have internalized, they change from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. While conducting a study about *The Identity Development of Multiracial Youth* Talbot (2008) expressed surprise when examining the results of her study, because it revealed that, despite most of the participants' ability to move past traditional monoracial ways of thinking about race, they used the same racialized tools that society as a whole uses, when asked to depict themselves and their families. According to Talbot (2008) as the participants answered the interview the questions, they used descriptions of stereotypical behavior associated with race (talking black, having good rhythm, being quiet and reserved) and physical attributes associated with race (kinky hair, flat nose, slanted eyes). In the end Talbot (2008) concluded that perhaps, even though the participants were ready psychologically to engage race in a more complex manner, they did not yet have a body of language to express that complexity of racial identity and racism.

Further, while exploring other factors that influence racial self-labeling, Talbot's (2008) study points to the significance of public role models. For example, the participants in her study

cited that they were affected by golfer Tiger Woods's public declaration that he was "Cablinasian" (a term he made up to describe his heritage: Caucasian, Black, American-Indian, and Asian). But the influence of the social context, extended family and schooling also played a role in helping these participants opt for a particular self-label. For instance, when the participants in Talbot's (2008) were specifically asked how they came to understand or have knowledge about their cultural heritages, most of them talked about the decisive role of grandparents, college and university courses, books, and cultural celebrations or programming.

Additional works also describe the challenges faced by multiracial children as they try to choose a racial label for themselves. Case in point, Schwartz (1998) holds that, as the number of multiracial individuals increases, particularly over generations, so do the choices for categorization. As a result individuals may choose to adopt all the different ethnicities they represent. Perhaps a multitude of heritages, or they may opt to align themselves exclusively with a new group whose commonality is the multiple heritages of its members as well.

But even within the multiracial community there is a lack of consensus about how to characterize mixed-race individuals. Schwartz (1998) maintains that it is not unusual to stumble on several alternative views regarding classification within the multiracial community, because parents tend to choose different ways of identifying their children, and because the youth themselves spend a significant amount of time considering how they want to be labeled. However, building upon other studies Schwartz (1998) explains that when children reach adolescence and adulthood, many reconsider their racial identity.

Nevertheless such reconsideration is not without conflicts, for in trying to avoid choosing between parents and peers, these individuals may keep home separate from school. Schwartz (1998) suggests that they may feel pressured by peers and teachers; the forms they must fill out; or they might even feel pressured by family, to choose a specific race. Her findings demonstrate that also complicating this integration for multiracial youth is the need to work through internal conflicts and guilt about having to develop an identity that may not encompass all aspects of their heritage. In addition, the refusal to give in to internalizing society's negative attitudes about multiracialism and minority category makes the integration even more challenging.

While studying the racial identity of multiracial students, Kellogg (2006) asserted that the results of her study revealed that despite varying meanings, most students interviewed not only viewed racial identity as a personal and private possession, but also recognized its very public nature. Kellogg (2006) maintains that the participants' conceptions of their own racial identity were consistent with others, whether it was societal characterization of racial categories or peers' perceptions of their race.

Does it mean that these young multiracial children would allow others to decide which racial marker they would choose? Kellogg's (2006) response indicates that participants in her study did not exactly consent to others defining their racial identity, only that they were conscious of its public and personal aspects. According to Kellogg (2006), while some students talked about the subjectivity of racial categories and the limited way in which race was understood in this country, they also recognized the reality of race and the ways in which it influences the ways people see themselves and how others view them. Kellogg (2006) claims

that, in her study the participants' perception of the term "racial identity" served as a context for understanding how they made sense of their own individual racial identity.

Racial Identity via Peer Pressure

In a study about experiences of biracial students in an urban high school, Moore (2006) demonstrated that the findings of her research confirmed that biracial adolescents felt pressured by peers to choose a racial identity that fits the way they appeared racially. Moore (2006) also looked at the way the formal school setting -- teachers, curriculum, institutional forms, and school activities -- created a monoracial label for biracial students. The data from this study showed that biracial individuals are forced to live within "color boundaries" created by social construction of race. Moore (2006) notes that the biracial individuals interviewed created a self-identity that was affected by how others categorize them racially.

Nevertheless, in the end, they came to an understanding of their own identity through a multiracial lens and learned to discount the social construction of race. But most of all, this study suggests that multiracial students are not aware of how schools reinforce the monoracial labeling and put emphasis on white values. This labeling system which is often employed by their peers and educators, is accentuated through forms, literature, and curriculum adopted by schools. "Until multiracial people become aware of all the levels of racism they are confronted with on a daily basis and then come together as a community to demand change, then monoracial categorization will continue to be used in schools and by society" (Moore 2006, p. 131). Most notably, Moore (2006) writes that the students she interviewed were all surprised when she pointed out the lack of multiracial curriculum in their learning context. These students felt they

had no control in getting the district to change the informational forms to be inclusive of a multiracial category.

Social and Racial Power

In light of this argument, how can we encourage educational practices that foster critical thinking, and endorse gender and race sensitive strategies that build awareness of multiple forms of discrimination against racially marginalized individuals? In discussing the importance of critical race theories, Deyhle et al. (1999) offers a way to understand how ostensibly race-neutral structures in education help shape and regulate the boundaries of White supremacy and racism. Deyhle et.al (1999) contends that critical race theories can be used to deconstruct the meaning of "educational achievement," and to recognize that the classroom is a central site for the construction of social and racial power.

Nonetheless, Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) contend that the problem is that schools have not done enough to accommodate multiracial children. Due to the fact that schools are often the most immediate and direct contact multiethnic/multiracial children have with official, mainstream society, if the schools adopt a Eurocentric approach – in which they refer to ethnic heroes and famous cultural holidays only on specific times of the year – the multiracial/multiethnic student will be deprived of significant cultural role models.

Although many times educators might not be aware of biased conduct towards multiracial children, Chiong (1998) warns that schools and teachers may unknowingly transmit monoracial identity messages to multiracial students. This practice is difficult for some students who may want to identify with more than one race.

The U.S. race categorization process reflects the deficiencies of the concept of race in the culture of this country and it needs to be renegotiated (Chiong, 1998). This implies that current racial categorization of multiracial children reflects a society that is still renegotiating its own racial and ethnic identities, and these children bear the burdens of the difficulties. However, according to Chiong (1995), members of the multiracial community are seeking to do the same thing for their children. As a result, according to Chiong (1995), there is some changing of racial identity responsibility for interracial children and the re-negotiation with their communities as to how they will be perceived.

Moreover, Chiong (1995) asserts that unfortunately the categorization system in United States still consents to oppression of multiracial children. Therefore, all educators need be conscious of multiracial students' needs as we avow their distinctiveness by affirming, not ignoring, their characterization. "We need to look at how this categorization plays out in the classroom, in order to determine whether or not the racial identity of interracial children is enhanced or inhibited in our schools" (p. 118). How does our society refer to children of mixed racial background? Chiong (1995) holds that multiracial children's invisibility in society is reflected in the language of our racial categorization system that lacks the distinct words to include them. She characterizes this lack of a clear distinction of identity from monoracial children as something that has been instilled in our minds and built into our culture in ways that have resisted attempts to change the perception. This apparent dissimilarity happens even if the idea of ''pure'' race has been consistently invalidated.

Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) add to this argument by stating that it is fundamentally important that schools and communities support and encourage the multiethnic child. Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) add that the limited research available suggests that, despite the way parents raise their multiracial children or the marker they use to identify them, these children need to feel at ease about their collective heritage. These children also need to feel at ease about the racial and ethnic background of both parents. Schools are perhaps a key social context in which multiracial children have to learn to navigate; therefore Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) assert that "Schools are often the most immediate and direct contact multiethnic and multiracial families have with official, mainstream society. Thus, they carry a huge responsibility regarding meeting the unique needs of these families" (pp. 135, 136).

Therefore, in being attentive to these students' unique needs, we ought to find ways to help them not only to feel welcome in our schools, but also to ensure that they are part of the social milieu. In expanding on this theme, Wardle and Cruz-Janzen (2004) suggest that the best strategy to ameliorate the feeling of awkwardness is to support the family's choice of identity for their children. These authors note that, at best, schools should provide multiethnic/multiracial choices for the child and, at a minimum; the school must be highly sensitive to this issue and understand why these institutional forms cause so much concern to many of these families.

Racial Categorization

Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) make a case against the current practice in our schools by contending that "Multiethnic and multiracial children in our schools are often hurting and living in fear, because these children live with the fear that they will have to face the constant

harassment, hostility, invisibility, and insensitivity" (p. 45). According to these authors, no educational model that claims to battle social inequities and injustices can tolerate this type of conduct:

> By not having accurate information about multiethnic and multiracial children in our schools, by not supporting the inclusion of all their unique racial ethnic combinations in official school statistics, and by not including them in our schools' curricula at all grade levels and subject areas, we condone their continued abuse; we promote our ignorance and allow the stereotypes and fears to prevail. (p. 45)

These studies provide valuable evidence for our understanding of the processes through which schools and teachers may unknowingly transmit monoracial identity messages to multiracial students. In addition, these studies help us comprehend how multiracial children navigate a social context that often disregards their racial identity options. They also suggest that schools must adhere to practices that acknowledge these multiracial children complete heritage.

Politics of Education and Language

This argument reflects the pressing need to rethink education. As a result, we are called to be attentive to the literacy material used by schools because, as Du Bois (1965) suggested, we must commit to educational practices that work as a way to promote racial lift up. Further building on this argument, hooks (1994) contends that we must rethink education and ask both educators and students to raise critical questions about teaching and learning in order to foster critical "thinkers and social critics," who will help transform our educational institutions and society as well. What we have seen time and again, is educational practices that embrace what

Freire (1970) portrayed as the *banking system* in which knowledge is simply deposited (by the teacher) *in empty vessels* (student) and consequently students are kept from learning to think critically. When Multiracial children do not think critically about their own racial identity, they consent to the continuation of racial discrimination against themselves and other multiracial individuals.

In light of this argument, how can we encourage educational practices that foster critical thinking, and endorse gender and race sensitive strategies that help to build awareness of multiple forms of discrimination against racially marginalized individuals? Deyhle et al. (1999) offer a way to understand how seemingly race-neutral structures in education help shape and regulate the boundaries of White supremacy and racism. Deyhle et al. (1999) contend that critical race theories can be used to deconstruct the meaning of "educational achievement," and to recognize that the classroom is a central site for the construction of social and racial power.

These studies above, not only provide valuable evidence for understanding the processes through which schools and teachers may unknowingly transmit monoracial identity messages to multiracial students, but also help us comprehend how multiracial children navigate a social context that often disregards their unique needs.

Literacy and the Development of Identity

As multiracial children learn to navigate these perceived monoracial contexts, they frequently stumble on literacy that fails to acknowledge their full heritage, which in turn impacts their sense of worth. As I researched the literature for my study, I found a number of studies that

address the vital role of literature on Multiracial children's ability to view their racial identity as important. In what follows I will examine a few of these studies.

In explaining the fundamental importance of literacy on the development of racial identity, the findings offered by Compton-Lilly (2006) demonstrate how children's identities and cultural resources intersect and come together during literacy learning. The findings of this study indicate that the recent conceptions of identity view people's identities as multiple and situated. Consequently, the ways in which we see ourselves are filtered through the relationships we share with others, the knowledge and experiences we bring, and the contexts within which we live and learn (Compton-Lilly, 2006). In this context according to (Compton-Lilly, 2006), we often come across literacy that is read and taught in school, in a way that perpetuates racism and sexism due to schools' construct of social-political values about literacy that shapes prejudice, power and White privilege. Therefore, based on this assumption, Compton-Lilly (2006) concludes that it is imperative to keep in mind that the identities we construct, shape our literacy practices while literacy practices become a means for acting out the identities we assume.

Similarly, Fernsten (2005) discusses how identity could be shaped during literacy learning. In this study, Fernsten (2005) explores the concept of writer identity and its influences as constructed by a group of college writers. Using a poststructural and sociocultural perspective, it takes a stand regarding the politics of language and the teaching of writing, especially as they relate to students whose racial, ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds differ from the dominant culture of school. Fernsten (2005) contends that many are naive about the politics of education and language, especially as they relate to student writing and the language of those

learners whose racial, ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds vary from their own as well as the dominant culture of school.

The components presented above correspond to those described by Wardle (2000) as he voices his discontent with the persistent lack of literary work on individuals of multiethnic origin. Wardle (2000) argues that it is regrettable that, at a time when books, workshops, journal articles, conferences, and classes aimed at meeting the needs of single-race children and other diverse populations are on the rise, multiracial and multiethnic children are almost totally overlooked. The section that follows will describe themes observed in this review of the literature.

Themes Presented in the Literature Reviewed

This review of previous literature provides an overview along with essential information about the issues in study here, such as women of color's struggles with racism, sexism and their attempt to provide their children with an adequate racial identity. In addition this overview examines factors affecting multiracial individuals and their families, and the distinctive challenges they face to gain broader acceptance of their racial heritage. Embedded within these works are examples of constant struggles with racism and sexism, doubt and invisibility of multiracial individuals.

From these studies we are able to extrapolate important themes that are presented here. For example:

1. Delgado (1993), West (2003) and hooks (2003) wrote about *race* issues describing how *racism* clearly contributes to a class system in the U.S. society, as a direct result of racial discrimination and intolerance.

2. *Sexism and gender issues* are presented through the literature as well, describing how social and political thoughts have commonly, accepted and confirmed women's subordinate position in social and political life, either explicitly or implicitly, and how capitalism and patriarchy curtails women's behavior in some spheres even as freedom from limitations is tolerable in other areas (Beasley, 1999; hooks 2000).

3. *The intersection of race and gender* for women of color was also presented as Wing (2004); and hooks (2000) explain that every social indicator points to the fact that women of color remain stuck at the bottom of American society.

4. Another important theme that emerged from this review of literature was the *racial designation of multiracial children*. Kerwin et al. (1993) claim that there is no doubt that racial labeling is a major source of apprehension for parents of multiracial children, as these parents tend to challenge the racial labels imposed upon their children by society. Brunsma (2005) expands on this issue by claiming that there is enough evidence that indicates a movement by the parents of multiracial children away from minority status through racial labeling and towards "Multiracial" and "White" movements that are predicated upon gender, and class. Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004), however, contend that, in fact what we typically see is the minority parent in the relationship often opting for the child to be raised with the minority marker.

Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005), in a study about *raising biracial children* explain that a new model of racial identity for multiracial children is necessary, one that takes into consideration the interaction between structural, psychological, and relational factors that undeniably affect the identity development of multiracial individuals and that reassures them that no one racial identity is more significant than another.

5. Some of the studies reviewed focused on the process of *racial designation by multiracial children themselves*. These studies indicated that racial self-labeling evolves with time, since it changes from childhood to adolescence to adulthood (Talbot 2008; Roth 2005; Schwartz 1998). These researches also indicated that children who are old enough to have their own ideas about their identity may sway their parents' labeling decisions.

   Schwartz (1998) holds that, as the number of multiracial individuals increases, particularly over generations, so do the choices for categorization, and as result individuals may choose to adopt all the different ethnicities they represent. Perhaps a multitude of heritage, or they may opt to align themselves exclusively with a new group whose commonality is the multiple heritages of its members as well.

   Haines (1998) suggest that while there are increased possibilities for bridges across racial borders within young interracial families, these relationships are not immune to racial strains. Kellogg (2006) holds that multiracial students' conceptions of their own racial identity are interconnected with others, whether they are societal definitions of racial categories or peers' perceptions of their race.

6. Another important aspect presented in the literature is the awareness of the fact that, *schools and teachers may inadvertently transmit monoracial identity messages* to multiracial students, which is difficult for some students who may want to identify with more than one race (Chiong 1998; Wardle & Cruz-Janzen 2004). Moore (2006) also looked at the way the formal school setting -- teachers, curriculum, institutional forms, and school activities -- created a monoracial label for biracial students. The data from these studies mentioned above showed that biracial individuals are forced to live within "color boundaries" created by social construction of race. These studies provide valuable evidence for our understanding of the processes through which schools and teachers may unknowingly transmit monoracial identity messages to multiracial students, which is difficult for some students who may want to identify with more multiple races.

7. *The intersection of children's identities and cultural resources* was also examined as Compton-Lilly (2006) demonstrated how children's identities and cultural resources intersect and come together during literacy learning. Compton-Lilly (2006) suggested that the identities we construct shape our literacy practices while literacy practices become a means for acting out the identities we assume.

Although this research review may not account for all nuances of the intersection of race and gender and the struggles faced by multiracial individuals – particularly women of color mothers of multiracial children – after examining these previous studies and contrasting them against my research project, I conclude this literature review with the belief that my research will add to the literature that addresses issues of multiracial/multiethnic individuals, by specifically

examining the way these three women of color, born outside of the United States, choose a particular racial indicator for their multiracial children. My research echoes, but also builds upon, these works by exploring how they consider racial socialization factors that influence the learning environment and experiences of their multiethnic/multiracial children, and how these women examine their own racial identity in the process.

In addition, my study is designed to extend the literature in regard to the process of reconciling gender discrimination, languages, cultures, and multiple-identities, and how we – women of color – socially construct and re-construct our cultural identity through cross-cultural experiences as we network with, and negotiate, cultural discrepancies that impact the educational experience of our multiracial children.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

My choice of topic and research methodology for this study is directly associated with my own personal journey as a child of a mixed-race family, living in a mixed race marriage, having mixed race children, and living in voluntary exile from my native homeland, in a context that accentuates monoracial postulations.

As such, this study was informed by critical race feminist thought and framed by a qualitative inquiry and oral history as research methodology. In choosing a philosophy that underpins my research, critical race feminism – a framework that is depicted by its analysis of the interconnection of race/racism with gender/sexism and "other" – provided a layered lens through which to examine the multiple causes of invisibility of women of color. Generally, critical race feminism goes beyond identity politics by engaging scholars in an analysis of the politics of location and intersectionality. And in doing so, critical race feminist thought presents a unique feminist epistemology as it argues for the concept of social diversity and multiplicity within the feminist movement in the United States. Wing (1999) contends that critical race feminism consents to sexism and discrimination to be perceived cumulatively as it takes in consideration nationality, ethnicity, color, class, sexual orientation and identities, age, disability, religion, language, minority status and immigration status. In addition, critical race feminism contextualizes sexism within the relentless mesh of unjust constructs in our society.

I chose qualitative inquiry as a method for this study because of my interest in taking in to consideration the participants' lived experiences and their context. Researchers conducting qualitative studies typically take context into account as they get a grasp of the world from participants' perspective. In a qualitative study, the researcher takes into consideration that there is more than one reality. In the case of my research participants, their reality is spoken from the crossroads of race and gender coupled by cultural and language restraint. Under this circumstance, the experience of race and gender discrimination gains yet another degree of challenge as these women grapple with the reality of raising multiracial children, in a culture other than their own. Additionally, they have to deal with a culture that accentuates lines of racial demarcation not necessarily yet experienced by these women.

Thus, as I collected the stories of these three women I was attentive to the politics of location and the intersectionality of race and gender compounded by culture and language constraints. The fact that these three women of color and I are located within at least two subordinated groups that often pursue conflicting political agendas is a measure of intersectional disempowerment which men of color and white women hardly ever confront (Crenshaw 1995). Therefore, the qualitative research design fits well with the study of these three women of color and their multiracial children. Moreover, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) assert, that qualitative inquiries are often "shaped by class, race, gender, and ethnicity making the research a multicultural process" (p. 29). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) maintain, that in a

qualitative inquiry the researcher brings into the study her or his individual interpretive understanding that shapes, in its special way, the multiracial, gendered aspects of the research.

A distinctive component of my study is that the study participants and I (as a researcher) will add to the gendered and raced conversation the fact that we were born and raised in another country, but yet we are raising our multiracial children in the United States in a context still gripped with monoracial assumptions. Another characteristic of a qualitative research that adds to my study, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is that the researcher can preserve chronological flow, see which events leads to which results, and therefore, obtain sound explanation. In addition, as I tried to tell the stories of these three women I used a qualitative strategy in which words, especially structured into events or stories, had concrete, vivid, significant aspect that could prove far more appealing to a reader (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Oral History

Researchers using the critical race feminist framework often use narrative or story-telling to construct their data. As I collected the stories and oral representations of this study's participants, I used oral history methods to portray the history of their lived experiences.

Oral history is a type of qualitative method of research that involves gathering and safeguarding unique personal stories, memories, experiences, and perspectives of groups of people whose lived experiences might otherwise be obscured from history. In keeping with this theme, Reinharz (1993) maintain that oral histories make available records of people whose lives otherwise would not normally enter archives. Ritchie (2003) adds to this consideration by reminding us that recollection and memory is the crux of oral history, from which meaning can

be obtained and preserved. Chamberlain (2006) echoes this thought but then expands this issue by asserting that principles and priorities are often entrenched in memory descriptions. This is revealed by the language used or by the basic structure of the recollection, and describes as the collective nature of memory, particularly when they become embedded in or through the prevailing culture.

How does oral history work to empower my research participants through the narrative of their lives? Grele (1996) responds by stating that an essential characteristic of oral history is its capacity to better understand the perspective of the participants. This aspect of oral history impels me to assume that oral history afforded my participants an opportunity to embark on a journey that involved exploring, analyzing, comparing, and reexamining the story of their own lives.

Perks and Thomson (1998), add to this discussion by asserting that one important aim of oral history has been the empowerment of individuals or social groups through the process of remembering and reinterpreting the past, with an emphasis on the value of process as much as historical product. Thus, after examining the transcript of the participants' interview, I constructed a narrative that helped to situate the three participants' lived experiences. These interviews revealed stories of struggles with racism, sexism and racial invisibility for the participants as well as their multiracial children. The participants provided examples of how aspects of sexism, racism, heritage pride, and racial invisibility have been a part of their lives and the lives of their children.

As I conducted this study, I envisioned the participants' oral stories connecting elements and stitching together bits of data (Miles and Huberman, 1994) crafting a narrative of their experiences with racism, sexism and their struggles to overcome invisibility and racial discrimination for themselves and their multiracial children. In doing so, I venture to presume that as these research participants told their stories; they had a chance to reflect on their own situation and ideally have gained some awareness and empowerment during the narrative process. For example, one of my study's participants stated that although she had not previously considered labeling her children as multiracial, she started to consider a multiracial identity for herself and her children as result of this study. Some of the questions and discussions in the interview session prompted her to raise questions about the true racial identity of her children and herself. In turn, this awareness has given her a sense of empowerment.

Although the practice of telling stories from generation to generation has been used for as long as communication has existed, the acknowledgement of this practice as a valid research method is relatively new. Maze (2006), speaks of the history of oral history in the United States beginning with the inaugural program, launched in 1948 as the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University. Created before the arrival of accessible recording technology, the background of oral history was, inevitably, written transcripts. Interviews with former slaves were among the first written transcripts (Maze 2006).

Moreover, the espousal of oral history by feminists as a research practice, according to Sangster (1994), surfaced from the awareness that conventional sources have often ignored the lives of women. Sangster (1994) adds that oral history presents a way of integrating women into

historical scholarship, even contesting the reigning definitions of social, economic and political substance that frequently disregard women's lives. Gluck (2006) comes into this discussion by maintaining that in contrast to the first generation of largely academic historians and archivists who ran oral history collection programs in universities, many of the original women oral historians were feminist supporters. While many women had been gathering oral histories for years as part of their involvement in community-based feminist organizations, others had been gathering oral history as a pedagogical tool in the burgeoning women's history and women's studies movements.

Another prescription, which the androcentric practitioners did not specifically acknowledge, centered on the question of cultural similarities. Feminist practitioners – who initially were always women – assumed a guaranteed connection hinged on gender. They did acknowledge cultural differences based on race, class, ethnicity, and even regional identifications, and while the preference was for cultural likeness/similarity, there was an understanding that the role of the "outsider" was often a critical necessity. There was even recognition that the outsider sometimes was able to do a better interview than an insider. The politics of women's oral history, with its rhetoric of giving voice to the voiceless, coupled with limited resources and a commitment to advocacy and empowerment, led many second-generation practitioners to develop simple, alternative means of processing interviews (Gluck, 2006, p. 362).

Due to the fact that this research was shaped by my own experience as a woman of color raising multiracial children in a small town, my role in this study was of an insider researcher. As

such, because I share the participants' culture, concerns and context, I was able to establish better rapport with the participants and therefore not only eliminate distrust and suspicions, but also allow them to share private and important details of their lives in a way that would not be possible to an outsider researcher. However, on the flipside, as an insider researcher, I also assumed the risk of assuming certain postulations. For example, prior knowledge of the phenomenon in study added to my personal biases and preconceived ideas of sexism and racism might have affected how the participants were accessed and how the information was given to me as an insider researcher. Nonetheless, in the end, as an insider researcher I had the opportunity to access and understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspective. This privileged access, in turn, might have worked to enhance this research experience. As Weiler (1999) noted, I feel privileged by my connections with these three women and by my education, which has permitted me to carry out this research. Thus, I view my friendship with the participants as an advantage rather than a disadvantage to this study.

In keeping with the theme of interviews, Anderson and Jack (1991) also make clear that oral interviews are particularly valuable for uncovering women's perspectives. As detailed in the work of Anderson and Jack (1991), anthropologists have observed how the expression of women's unique experience as women is often muffled, particularly in any situation where women's interests and experiences are different from those of men. Nevertheless, in contesting the academic androcentric nature of social sciences, Minister (1991) claims that the male sociocommunication subculture is assumed to be the rule for social sciences interviewing, and, as faithful as oral history is to its unique objective of obtaining recollected experience, men's forms of communication also are assumed to be the rule for oral historians interviewing. Gluck (2006) argues that regardless of this aspect of oral history, it remains a

significant tool both for empowering women, by bringing forth their voices and their sometimes covert forms of resistance, and for advocating on their behalf by documenting their experiences of inequity and subjugation.

Oral History Interviews

In-depth interview is a viable procedure to harness information from the point of view of the participants. Through direct contacts with my study's participants I was able to get detailed information about their stories and struggles as they grappled with the racial invisibility of their children, and their struggles to recognize their own racial identity coupled by the fact that they are situated in the intersection of race and gender.

Why interview? The use of interviews is a reliable research method to obtain information from participants, and many researchers have learned to trust the interview as the means to amass specific information and to document lived experiences. There are a range of responses dealing with interviews as a significant method to gather information from research participants. For instance, Hoffman (1996) holds that the oral history method typically makes use of interviews to collect memories, accounts and interpretations of events from the recent past, which are of historical significance.

Anderson and Jack, (1991) for their part, view oral history interviews as a tool to grant important means of spawning new insights about women's experiences of themselves in their worlds. The insights offered by Chamberlain (2006) – who argued that the interview is a multilayered document – present an overview of the role of the interview in a study depicting individual narratives of subjugated groups. "It can and does contain information, and often it is

information not possible to collect from more conventional historical sources. It contains an individual perspective; one person is recounting in a style of their choosing" (p. 402). A further advantage of the interview as a research tool, according to Green-Powel, (1997), hinges in the fact that it is possible for the researcher to talk openly with her participants and to examine their thinking first hand.

The spontaneous exchange within an interview offered possibilities of freedom and flexibility for me as a researcher and the participants as well. In conducting the interviews the conversations between the participant and me flowed as a chat between two friends, which in turn gave me the freedom to ask sensitive questions that might not have been possible in a more formal conversation, and it gave the participants the freedom to answer the questions without concern for sounding inappropriate.

This argument resonates well with that offered by Sypher et al. (1994) as they suggest that the interview process has an inherent advantage over most kinds of interpersonal encounters, for interviews are not impromptu, as it offers roles for both the researcher and participants. The role of the interviewer is to obtain information, and the key responsibility of the oral history interviewee is to grant information.

In the oral history practice as narrators are drawn into the interview process they predict the interviewer's interest, excitement and anticipation. The interviewee sees the interviewer's body language and, as they hear the first question, they note how the interviewer's facial expression turns into an eager listener's gaze. Narrators then understand that they are expected to talk. It is at this point that the oral history interview frame has been offered and accepted, and

this frame will determine to a large extent how meaning is projected, modified, and interpreted in this situation (Minister, 1991).

In conducting this oral history study, I spent an extended amount of time with the participants in order to capture important details of their stories of struggles with sexism and racism. After examining the transcript of the participants' interviews, I constructed a narrative that helped to situate their lived experiences. These interviews portrayed stories of pride, confusion, as well as struggles with racism, sexism and racial invisibility for participants and their multiracial children as well. The participants described how different aspects of sexism, racism and racial invisibility have been a part of their lives. In support of this view of oral history, Green-Powell (1997) suggests that it is this aspect of the interview process that works as a decisive tool for capturing the feelings, manner, thoughts, and perceptions of the participants under study.

However, it is important to remember that researchers in general, not just social science researchers, depend on the interview as a resource to acquire information, with the assumption that interviewing yields true and accurate pictures of the respondents themselves and their lives (Frey & Fontana, 2003). As I interviewed these women and listened to the stories of their lives – which were stories of dealing with silence, inequalities, gender and racial invisibility – I saw that this practice of storytelling and narrative fits well with the tenets of critical race feminism.

As Bengtson et al. (2005) indicate, critical race feminists acknowledge the legitimacy of integrating narrative documents and nontraditional data to understand human experience and create meaning. In fact, in the critical race feminism framework storytelling is fundamentally

important in giving voice to subjugated and silenced individuals, particularly for women of color as they experience the junction of race and gender discrimination. Therefore, through critical race feminism as a theoretical framework and oral history as a research methodology, I focused on the stories that these women of color told to me orally through the interviews, as they attempted to craft meaning and make sense of their circumstance as women of color and mothers of multiracial children.

Transcribing the Stories

In preparing to transcribe the participants' interviews I chose to continuously read about critical race feminism and oral history principles in order to better understand what I was required to do, what I should have disregarded, and how to come to a conclusion. Thus, the techniques of oral history in a critical race feminism framework guided this procedure. Maze (2006) posits that oral history practice often subscribes to transcription due to the convenience of immediate access to printed material. Once I finished interviewing the participants, I chose to transcribe the material immediately after each individual session, before I began another interview with the other participants, in order to describe how I thought that participant fit with the emergent themes in question. But most importantly, I wanted to remember the body language – the gestures, motions, frowns and in some cases tears – of each individual participant. I opted to employ this procedure in an attempt to get the best interpretation possible of what the participants intended to communicate.

For example, as I listened intently to one of my participants talk about her community and family acceptance of her African-American husband – although she did not express

specifically that she feared her community and Hispanic family's rejection of her husband – she crossed her arms tight and shrugged her shoulders as if conveying the fear of rejection from her own Hispanic family. This body language helped me understand the discomfort and suspicion the participant had about her family's approval of her husband.

In support of this view Green-Powel (1997) suggests that although recordings of interview conversations are fundamentally important to the interpretation of the material, it is equally crucial for the researcher to support the recorded material with mental and written remarks of impressions expressed through nonverbal cues, passive behavior, and non-events.

In transcribing the interviews for this study, I tried to reflect the participants' words as accurately as possible. However, Maze (2006) cautions that the difficulty with transcription of oral history is that the spoken words and the printed text intended to be read are distinctive from each other. This argument resonates well with that presented by Frey and Fontana (2003) as they contend that while interviewing, asking questions and getting answers is not as easy as it seems because, the spoken or written word always has a residue of vagueness, regardless of how researchers construct the questions and how carefully they state or code the answers. However, Maze (2006) recognizes that, in the end, if done properly, once the interviews become text, this dissimilarity could be diminished.

Nonetheless, the oral history practice has evolved and the use of text/transcript is no longer the sole source of giving voice to those masked by history. Gluck (2006) makes a case that while the first generation of oral historians, men and women alike, focused on creating text/transcripts, many of the second generation oral historians focused more on voice,

recognizing that the oral history was a unique document. “Inspired, empowered, and flush with the new knowledge imparted by the voices of formerly unknown and unrecognized women, some feminist oral historians touted the oral history narratives as a reflection of women’s experience” (pp. 364-365). Gluck (2006) goes on to add that just as issues about meaning were starting to surface, depicting the oral history narrative a bit more obscure, the empowering prospect of the oral history method also came into question, and the substantiation that women seemed to experience in unfolding their life stories, came under tremendous scrutiny.

Despite of this questioning of the dependability of oral history, I opted to draw on oral history narrative to document these study participants’ history of struggle with subordination and opposition to discrimination. I have the confidence that oral history narratives put forward the means to understand the stories of these three women’s lives as they attempted (through their narratives) to give meaning to the events that shape their lives.

Listening to One Story at a Time

In conducting oral history interviews a researcher spends an extended amount of time individually with one participant in order to learn at length about factors that affects her life or a specific part of her life. How do interviews fit with the oral history research design? Through interviews, oral history studies afford the possibility of exploring matters in depth. Thus, it is not unusual for oral history research to include interviews that are relatively long. Long interviews provide plenty of time to probe deeply into issues as they occur.

Thus, my choice of interviewing only three women rather than a larger number of participants is the direct result of my intentions to capture a better picture of their lives and to

conduct a more meticulous study and analysis of the individual stories of these women through their personal narratives. In addition, interviews allowed these three women to raise questions that they sensed were significant to their understanding of sexism and racial identity issues. This process helped my oral history investigation by highlighting things that mattered to these three women. Through this course of action I was able to see the phenomenon from these three women's perspective.

Another advantage of the oral history research is that it relies on in-depth interviews and does not call for technologically complicated or costly equipment in order to collect and analyze the data. Yet, another benefit of oral history is that the spontaneous exchange within an interview presents possibilities of flexibility for researchers and narrators. For the research participants, the interview provided them the opportunity to tell their own story in their own terms. For me as the researcher, the taped interviews preserved (Anderson and Jack, 1991) a living interchange for present and future use. Perks and Thomson (1998) add that in using oral history as a methodology, we need to "persistently analyze the interview as an interactive process, study the context of the interview, especially inherent power inequalities, and always assess our own ethical obligations as feminists to the women we interview" (p. 94).

How does an oral history methodology work with a framework that contests the oppression of women of color such as critical race feminism? Oral history fits well with the tenets of critical race feminism because in the critical race feminist framework, storytelling is fundamentally important in giving voice to subjugated individuals as they try to define and express their identity. In this research inquiry the three women participants told stories that

echoed their lived experience as influenced by racial identity, gender, culture, religion, class, and education.

Why get direct account from the participants through interviews? Denscombe, (2007), points out that considering things through the eyes of others when dealing with the way people experience aspects of their lives is important to present matters as closely as possible to the way that those concerned understand them. Therefore, specific questions in the interviews highlighted these women's experiences within their communities and schools attended by their children.

Context of the Research

A qualitative, critical race feminist research focuses on the numerous factors affecting the oppression of and prejudice against women of color, and one of these aspects is the study context. Fogerty (2006) argues that the context of a study and the circumstances surrounding the interviews are fundamentally important to the researcher's ability to interpret the information. Sangster (1994) contends that while an emphasis on language and narrative form has increased our understanding of oral history, one should worry about the dangers of accentuating form over context, of stressing deconstruction of individual narratives over analysis of social patterns. Without a firm grounding of oral narratives in their material and social context, and a probing analysis of relation between the two, insights on narrative form and on representation may remain unconnected to any critique of oppression. In conducting this study, I took into consideration not only the history of the lived experiences of these three women, but I also examined the context of the study and how the narrative stories of these three women of color translate into social meanings.

In turn, Perks and Thomson (1998) maintain that in order to contextualize oral histories, we need to analyze the dominant ideologies affecting women's worlds. And listening to women's words will help us to see how women understand, negotiate and sometimes confront dominant ideals. Perks and Thomson (1998) contends, and I concur, that understanding the ideological context of a study may help to unravel the apparently ambiguous effects of ideology and experience.

Thus, in this section I will discuss the context of this study, which is partially informed by my experience as a woman of color living in a town that has a history of social injustice and racial struggles. This research project was conducted in the Sumter County area. This is the locale my children and the children of the other three women attend school, and where I work as an English for speakers of other language (ESOL) teacher. And that is where I am most familiar with the way multiracial children in this area deal with issues of racial identity.

In Sumter County the issue of race has normally been explored through the traditional bipolar Black/White arguments, and these conflicts have been manifested in many aspects of this community. The Sumter County area is home to "Peace Noble Prize Laureate" and former president Jimmy Carter, as well as the organization Habitat for Humanity and Koinonia Farm, a peacemaking, social justice community where Black and White people live in an intentional religious-based community.

Sumter County, with its scenic and historic beauty and extraordinary cultural resources, has seen its share of not so beautiful injustice, racial conflicts and intolerance. Sumter County also houses Andersonville National Cemetery, a national park that is the resting place of more

than thirteen thousands Union soldiers who died in a Confederate prison during the Civil War. The Andersonville National Cemetery is a bleak reminder of the ultimate outcome of hate and violence. In contrast to Andersonville Cemetery, only a few miles from Andersonville, is another Sumter County landmark – Koinonia Farm – founded on principles exactly the opposite to those fashioned in the Andersonville national park Koinonia Farm instead focus on the principles of love, tolerance and nonviolence (Dykeman and Stokely 1958).

History of Turmoil

Although White resistance and recrimination were not limited to the South, it was particularly widespread and intense in this region, for many Southern Whites maintained that racial integration was unacceptable (Pinar, 2004). In keeping with the theme of racial intolerance so familiar to Sumter County and other communities across the South, Deever (1991) writes about the history of similar racial conflicts deep-rooted in the history of school desegregation in Bulloch County. Deever (1991) explains that in spite of the federal government's directive to desegregate public schools, the leaders of Bulloch County not only tried to defy court orders, but they also established ways to perpetuate racial isolation through curriculum tracking, which caused segregation to become merely reinvested in a more disperse and subtle shape in public school in Bulloch County. Furthermore in Deever's (1991) account, schools in Bulloch County were part of the social context in which Blacks and Whites lived within a particular relation of power, with the Whites as the dominator and the Blacks as the subjugated. Similar debate has been waged on the national front and in Sumter County as well.

Hence, at a time when a large segment of the society in the United States declined to extend equality to black people, this reality was not different in Sumter County, nor in Bulloch County as demonstrated by Deever (1991). This community like many others across this nation saw its share of unrest, such as fierce hostility towards Koinonia Farm. This hostility in the end led to the bombing of an Americus market that carried Koinonia products in 1956 as well as other events that demonstrated intolerance and racial discrimination. However, events such as this also propelled civil rights activists across the United States and in the Sumter County area to organize demonstrations, marches, boycotts, strikes, and voter-registration drives, and to repudiate the laws that they knew were unreasonable.

The years 1961 to 1965, the height of the civil rights movement in southwest Georgia, were also critical in the local struggle to end segregation, social injustice, lack of voting rights, and discrimination in schools and jobs. During that period, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spent a weekend in the courthouse jail in Americus, after a detention in Albany. And in light of all this intolerance, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) cautioned that Americus could become the next Selma, Alabama – a frightening allusion to the well-known Selma-to-Montgomery march for voting rights that had taken place during the spring of 1965. That same spring the arrest of four black women, Mary Kate Fishe Bell, Mamie Campbell, Lena Turner, and Gloria Wise, for voting in the white women's voting line caused intense protests in Sumter County.

A civil rights movement called the Americus-Sumter County Movement was created under these circumstances. This organization played a crucial role in setting the stage for the

1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. These two laws placed the federal government directly on the side of racial justice. This movement was organized and guided by Rev. Joseph R. Campbell in 1963, and it altered permanently the place of African-Americans in Americus, Sumter County, and Southwest Georgia.

Members of the Sumter County Movement filled the streets of Americus with an estimated 600 marchers. The Voting Rights Act was signed into law in early August, and before the end of the year more than 2,000 African Americans had registered to vote in Sumter County. After schools opened in late August, the number of Black students enrolled in previously segregated schools increased from 4 in 1964 to almost 90 in 1965 (Robins, 2008). And as a direct result, two Georgia laws were declared unconstitutional by a federal tribunal meeting in Americus. Further color barriers were first removed in 1965 when J.W. Jones and Henry L. Williams joined the Americus police force. Lewis M. Lowe was elected as the first Black city councilman 10 years later. With their election in 1995, Eloise R. Paschal and Eddie Rhea Walker broke the gender barrier on the city's governing body as the first women to be elected to a city office. On August 20, 2009, Eddie Rhea Walker resigned her seat due to health problems. Nonetheless, she left behind a legacy that broke the gender barrier in the Sumter county area.

According to Mahone (2007), the summer of 1963 was indeed a defining moment in the history of African Americans in Americus and Sumter County area. After months of mass meetings and voter registration drives, community mobilization suddenly impelled hundreds of students into the streets to object to racist policies that literally enslaved Blacks both physically and emotionally. Mahone (2007) writes that these acts of courage indicated a profound paradigm

shift in the way African American saw themselves as individuals and as a community under siege. However, those who had the courage to defy the Jim Crow laws of that era would not forget the police brutality, mass incarcerations, and murders committed against Blacks.

When it came to affording a meaningful educational experience to Black children, the Civil rights Act of 1964 was not enough to insure school desegregation in this area and most of the South. Many racist school systems chose to defy the law by intimidating and threatening Black students and other individuals that fought to end racial segregation in the schools. At the same time, the South saw religion play an important role in resegragating schools, for this region experienced an increased number of All-White Christian academies.

Anderson (2003) explains that the 1964 Civil rights Act broke over Americus and the rest of the South with a tidal wave of changes in our society. On August 31, 1964 occurred what for many on both sides of the civil rights struggle had been considered unfeasible, the actual racial integration of Americus High School. Robertiena Freeman, Dobbs Wiggins, and Minnie Wise entered Americus High School under the so-called Freedom of Choice Plan. Anderson (2003) argues that it was only a symbolic integration under a "freedom of choice" plan, because in fact the few Black students that entered the formerly All-White school were subjected to unrelenting verbal, physical and psychological mistreatment. These four students faced intense, constant persecution, and after a few months only Robertiena Freeman remained enrolled in the school. She had prevailed as one of the girls at the stockade and was determined to honor her loyalty to the cause of racial justice. At the end, Robertiena Freeman’s conviction and belief in equal rights and educational opportunity for all people, regardless of color, set a great example.

However, the White segregationists were equally resolute to sustain segregation. Just weeks before the school year ended, Robertiena Freeman was once again victimized by local law enforcement when she and her boyfriend were arrested. Thrown in jail during exam week, Robertiena Freeman pleaded with her mother to retrieve her school books so that she could prepare for her exams. In the end, Americus officials released Robertiena Freeman and allowed her to take the exams on the condition that she left the state for the summer of 1965. To no avail, according to Robins, (2008), they hoped her absence would diminish the spirit of protest.

In February 1966, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission issued a report that intimidation, harassment and violence had accompanied Americus' school desegregation. The potential loss of vital federal funds was narrowly prevented by the board's relocation of 175 Black students to previously All-White schools in March of 1967.

Anderson (2003) notes that, the decisive moment for the Americus City School System came in 1970. Under a U.S. District Court order for compliance with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare's directives eradicating dual racial school systems, the board announced a 55 to 45 black-white ratio for each of its schools in January 1970. Discontentment and outraged reaction from much, but not all, of the White community forced the board to reverse itself at the next monthly meeting. A three-judge federal panel in April of 1970 ruled the city's plan inadequate and threatened a pending cut-off of state funds. The board finally met the terms in May of 1970 with a plan that "paired" students in grades one through five, while those in grades six through twelve would attend the same schools (Anderson 2003).

Actual meaningful racial integration of the Americus schools was at long last accomplished on August 31, 1970, according to Anderson (2003), with an enrollment of 1,136

Whites and 1,725 Blacks. Nonetheless, a suspicious fire early that morning wreaked havoc with the 1936 building, which had by then become A.S. Staley Junior High School. What is ironic is that despite the obviously confrontational nature of the incident, Life Magazine published an article entitled *"Discovering One- Another In a Georgia Town"* in its issue of February 12, 1971 that portrayed Americus' school integration as relatively benign.

Nevertheless, while old fashioned racial bigotry has declined significantly over the last few decades in Sumter County and across this region, hidden and, often, subconscious racial bias continues to hinder opportunities for people of color in Sumter County. These hindrances, at the end, could hamper the progress of everyone in the Sumter County area because local communities of color still face unreasonable barriers, from education to employment to healthcare to housing, to criminal justice. These obstacles could prove to be even more challenging to mixed-race individuals.

How can racially mixed individuals succeed in the midst of this bipolar struggle between Blacks and Whites? With the advent of Habitat for Humanity and a thriving state university in town, one would have to admit that the Sumter County area begin to enjoy a certain level of diversity due to the constant influx of people from around the world who work for Habitat for Humanity or to teach or attend Georgia Southwestern University. It is in this context that I started my multiracial family; it is in this context that I first met my husband Wayne, who is originally from Michigan but has lived in Ghana, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Bolivia among other countries. A social context that impacted our views on racial issues, a context in which we face challenges to raise our multiracial children due to limited sources of multiracial role models and a context where people still frown at mixed-race family. It is in this context that the three

study's participants and I live and raise our multiracial children. It is in this circumstance that I collected the participants' narratives.

Narratives

A narrative inquiry almost always has strong autobiographical basis (Phillion, 2002) and it is not different in this study. Narrative inquiries almost always are about people's lives, their interests, concerns, and passions. A narrative approach, one that develops understandings from an experiential perspective, evolves from an ongoing, negotiated construction of understanding between researcher and participants, honors the histories of participants and the communities in which they live and work, and is philosophically compatible with multiculturalism.

Nettles (2005), depicts personal narrative as one that is cultural and set in a community. Why personal narrative? Because the personal narrative method provides the tools to tell the participants' experience as women of color, struggling to navigate a system that often overlooks the unambiguous needs of women of color, particularly those born overseas.

However, in the past, narratives were not perceived as creditable writings. For example, Harris (2005) reminds us that not long ago, this type of study was considered suspect and largely disregarded by the academic community because they were perceived as too personal and tilted to be of any real value in the world of scholarly research.

Through narrative interviews these three women had an opportunity to share their stories, from their own context and viewpoint. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) explain that "Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of

experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (p. 18). Furthermore, they hold that narrative inquiry works as a type of narrative experience. People have created and expressed meaning of their lives through storytelling and narratives to help create pictures of them, and this is particularly true for those who have been silenced by oppression. In tapping on themes the narrative is predicated upon, can narrative inquiry methods be used as a tool to construct understanding of racial and gender identity?

Delgado and Stefanic (2000) explain how storytelling plays a vital role in giving voice to oppressed groups as they point out that everyone writes stories these days. Not just stories or narrative theory, important as those are, but actually "once upon-a-time" type stories. Delgado & Stefanic (2000) contend that, there is a group of people who have been telling so-called "dominant" stories and other groups, often described as outgroups, who also tell stories, often ignored or neglected by dominant society.

In fact the marginality aspect of these outgroups works to define the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized. Yet what is important to notice is that actually, the appeal of stories for these groups should come as no surprise. These stories create bonds, representing unity, shared understandings, and meaning. (Delgado & Stefani 2000) contend that the cohesiveness that these stories bring into play is part of the strength of the outgroup, for an outgroup creates its own stories, which flow within the group as a kind of counter-reality On the other hand, the stories or narratives told by the ingroup helps to remind its members of its identity in relation to

outgroups, and grant it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as innate, (Delgado & Stefani 2000).

This aspect of narrative and storytelling helped the three participants in this inquiry to tell their stories of struggles with racism, sexism and invisibility of their children. By conveying their messages through narratives they made use of a relaxed setting to speak openly about their dissatisfaction with a system that persistently discriminates against themselves and their children, and ignores their plea for change of the outlook of multiracial individuals.

Researcher/Participants' Roles

As I conducted this inquiry and engaged in reciprocal and open communication with the participants, it was clear that there was a measure of comfort and familiarity between the participants and me, because we already knew each other through community and school interactions. However, a key discrepancy between us was that in conducting the study I took on a role of a researcher and they took the role of participants. Nonetheless, I understood that it was fundamentally important that in taking the role of researcher, I did not dampen the participants' voice. Westkott (1979) elucidates that when we treat our research participants as subjects rather than objects, we alter the research relationship to embrace the participants as knowers and instruments of change. Therefore, I opted to give voice to my participants as agents of knowledge, as well as present my own perspective of the issues in study.

Gluck (2006) questions if the application of sophisticated interpretive procedures mutes the participant's voice and strips her of her authorial control. Nonetheless, the deference I have for these three women directed me to take the role of an active listener and reflect upon my own

experience as a woman of color and mother of multiracial children, and how these experiences impacted my beliefs, values, perspective of the study and interpretation of their narratives.

Gluck (2006) also posits a question in which she asks if historians can share authorial control with the narrator, asking for her interpretation and/or her reaction to their interpretation. She claims that participants' interpretation requires that historians use accessible language, a goal to which many feminist scholars still subscribe. Gluck (2006) notes that today's new technology makes possible the presentation of the unmediated voice in its original form. In discussing the same ethical issues related to the practice of oral history, Gluck (2006) explains that over the past decade, most feminist practitioners have attempted to develop a model that is based neither on forming a "friendship" nor on adopting the stance of the remote observer/researcher. And this was precisely the posture I took as I interviewed the participants.

Reynolds (2003) also adds to this argument in confirming that power relations that exist between the researcher and the research participants are in a constant state of flux because each of them moves to occupy a position of power and authority during the interview. It is important to note, that in a qualitative research the researcher is an active participant (Anderson & Jack 1991). And as such, in this study through the oral history methodology, my aim was to reinforce the sense of connectedness that already existed between the three participants and me. But yet I understood that we – as research and participants – played specific roles and had specific expectations as the study developed. At a very basic level, power was vested with me as the researcher in terms of the study's design, implementation and the final reporting of the data. However, the research participants also exercised some measure of power in terms of actively

choosing the information they made available to me as the researcher during the interview (Reynolds, 2003).

The participants' role in this study was to partake in the interviews that involved a minimum of two 50-60 minute taped interviews. My role as researcher/participant was to contact the participants, provide appropriate information, conduct the interviews, transcribe and interpret the interviews, write the narratives and to write the dissertation.

Participant Selection

The oral history methodology was used to capture the personal knowledge of these three other women as I searched for an understanding of reasons why they chose a particular race indicator for their multiracial children. My own situation as a woman of color raising multiracial children in the United States shaped the methodology of this study and the choice of participants for this study. These women were chosen because they fit the criteria of multiraciality. They were born outside of the U.S., have resided in the country for 3 or more years, and are mothers of grade-school-age children of multiracial origin currently attending public schools in the Sumter County Schools district. Hence, women living in monoracial families, or multiracial women born in the United States were not represented in this study.

Because the participants were women that I personally knew, I took special precautions to ensure that the balance between my personal relationship with these three women and my role as an insider researcher were preserved. Nonetheless, it is fundamentally important that I recognize and attempt to understand the influence that my experience as a women of color and mother of Multiracial children, and my friendship with these three participants – added to my

own biases and outlook on issues such as racism and sexism – had on my decisions while conducting the study and analyzing the data collected as an insider researcher.

The Rules of Disclosure

The study was initially presented to the participants by personal conversations at different community and school functions. I asked them if they were willing to participate in the study and they agreed. I briefly explained the purpose of the research, outlined the time involved for the interviews, explained how data will be produced and what would be done with the information gathered.

In explaining the seriousness of the legal aspects of amassing information for a study, Shopes (2006), explains that the significance of the process of informed consent is for the interviewer to inform the potential narrator everything that person needs to know in order to decide whether or not to participate in an interview and to continue participation once interviewing has begun. Shopes (2006) adds that legal and ethical concerns are imperative because oral history is fundamentally grounded in a relationship between two people, and like all relationships, it is framed by rules, norms, and standards of behavior. Therefore, once the participants agreed to take part in this study I explained that on my first visit to interview them I would provide a consent form prior to audio taping. An explanation of possible adverse effect the research may have on the participants was fully disclosed in the consent form. I also explained that confidentiality would be accorded to all participants. For example, the records were coded and pseudonyms were used during recordings. I was the only one to have access to the participants' identity, since I personally transcribed the interviews.

Why personally transcribe the interviews? Because I expected that as I listened repeatedly to the interviews tapes, I would be able to get a sense for recurring, dominant themes and events, and it would help me to interpret and construe ideas and views instead of just writing statements given by the participants. Frey and Fontana (2003), emphasize the importance of personally transcribing and interpreting interviews by cautioning us about the odds of relying on interpreters due to the fact that the study might become susceptible to added layers of meanings, biases, and interpretations, which may lead to unfortunate misconstruction. Another reason why personally transcribed the interviews is because one of the participants speaks limited English. Therefore, her interview was conducted in Spanish, and then transcribed in Spanish and translated to English.

Data Analysis

While preparing for the interviews with the study participants, I was not sure if they would be willing to candidly speak about their private lives and include details related to their loved ones. However, going into the interviews, I got the impression from my participants that they felt somewhat special for having been asked to be the object of a study.

In an attempt to show my gratitude for the participants' willingness to partake in the study and to set a positive tone for our first meeting, I took a gift basket of Easter chocolates from different parts of the world to the first interview for each of the participants. They were surprised and grateful for the gesture. Because I am a teacher at their children's school, we started our conversation by discussing the relevant issues at school, and in our community. During the interviews relaxed conversation and side chats were the norm. And it is likely that I

was oblivious to the fact that maybe some of the questions worked as conversational prompts of some sort (Gollop1997). In the first meeting, before discussing the topic to be explored, we laughed and talked about the important events happening in our lives, such as new jobs, prospects of relocating to other towns, stress over our children's academic achievements, and other mutual issues.

When bringing up the topic of the study, I made an effort to share my perception of my own racial identity struggles, and focused on not appearing to be an expert on sexism and racial identity issues. In one of these preliminary discussions one of the participants talked about how she enjoys making quilts. We tried to make each other comfortable by discussing the art of quilt making, but stumbled on my low proficiency on the language of quilts. Nonetheless, I knew enough to draw a comparison of the lives of the three participants and myself. And in doing so, we talked about a quilt as an analogy of our collective lives. For example, the backing which is the fabric used for the reverse side of the quilt to help hold the other pieces together, was used to compare our commonalities such, all four of us are foreign born, women of color, mothers of multiracial children, married – or once married – to man born and raised in the United States.

These aspects of our lives serve to help us hold together the differences – such as coming from different countries, speaking different languages, having different experiences with racism, sexism and invisibility, and how we choose to deal with racial identity issues – that mark our lived experiences, just as the backing helps hold together the smaller pieces of fabric to form a bigger picture.

During the first interview, I started by asking the participants to talk about their lives and experiences with racial issues, before moving to the United States. These questions prompted the recollection of fun and difficult experiences while living in their respective country. The participants filled up an hour or more talking with enthusiasm about their lives, and the issues related to gender and racial identities.

In asking these questions, I was able to obtain information about gender and racial struggles faced by these three women, and get a sense of how they view themselves in terms of gender, race and invisibility in the context of the United States. Benmayor (1991) contends, and I concur, that life history, and other forms of oral history research often lead to a reexamination of theory and method. Therefore, in the process of writing I referred back to the transcript multiple times for more information and context. In doing so I felt bound to go back to the literature and find out what other studies have revealed. I desired to know how other scholars interpreted similar themes in their inquiries.

In an oral history methodology the topic could be explored using an interview guide that may be semi-structured or somewhat unstructured. The interviews in this study were consistent with the oral history methodology, for I chose to use a semi-structured interview guide. Although, an interview guide was used, deviations from the interview guide were evident. Nonetheless, the interview guide provided an arena for the participants to discuss their experiences as woman of color, reflect on their own racial identity, and the history of race relations in their country of origin. Thus, conducting the semi-structured interviews with these

three women gave me a chance to directly connect with them as I captured glimpses of their lived experiences.

Although I pursued the participants' thoughts more than I followed my own questions, I asked as many questions from the interview guide as possible. Participants were individually interviewed in person, at a site of participants' choice, in two sessions that ranged between fifty minutes to one hour. Even though the participants and I (as a researcher) already knew each other, the first session was used to help to initiate a conversation and a discussion about our personal histories, common struggles and similar experiences dealing with our racial identities before and after moving to the United States. In addition, the first session was used to explore changes in the participants' perceptions of racial issues after moving to the United States. Subsequently, the second interview was used to examine in more detail the specific areas associated with race and gender, especially as it relates to raising multiracial children attending Sumter County Schools. Participants were asked to provide additional information through the use of a brief demographic form before the first interview session (see appendixes). The objective of the demographic form was to gather information that may not have been granted during the interview sessions, to compare and contrast the participants, and to assist in crafting the participants' descriptions.

As the interviews proceeded and each one was analyzed, further questions were asked to address the emerging themes. At the end of the interview, the participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to add to the discussion. I informed participants at the outset that the interviews would last about an hour, and none of the participants showed signs of lack of

interest on the discussion, or declined to answer any question. Nonetheless, since I knew that I only had roughly an hour to conduct each interview, I made sure to try to get the most valuable information I could within that timeframe.

Each interview session began with an outline of the study being conducted, a reaffirmation that the interview would be recorded, and a statement that recognized the participant, the date, time, and location of the interview. As stated before, my main task in this study was to identify code and categorize the common patterns in the interview, and analyze the narratives. I focused on participants' perceptions of themselves and their mixed heritage children, and I generated a number of themes from the data amassed. Fogerty (2006) explains that every interview should be transcribed as soon as possible. "While transcription is a labor-intensive and lengthened process, it is necessary to a main goal of creating oral history and its use " (p.216). Thus, following each interview, I transcribed it verbatim using the audiotapes, a digital recorder, and a computer.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I thoroughly assessed them and edited the text into units of analysis, which received topical headings reflecting the content. This was done by making multiple copies of each transcript, with the original transcript kept as the unaltered copy. The other copies were marked, written on, color coded, and coded into numerical categories. Fogerty (2006) holds that it is important to retain the initial edited text because it records changes made in the original interview. These changes may include the removal of some false starts, repetitions, conversational peculiarity ("you know"), and the insertion of a word here and there to clarify the narrator's intent. Maze (2006) on the other hand explains that one of the challenges

of transcribing is how or whether – to present speakers' dialect, idiolect, or both on the printed page. Maze (2006), urges oral history researchers to deal with such popular oral forms of language since one of the challenges faced by transcription is conveying the context of the participants' remark in the transcripts. I opted to maintain the original conversational idiosyncrasies in the transcripts, in order to render my research participants' authentically in their own words.

After putting the interview in a narrative format, I crafted tables to help me categorize the data. The recurrent themes from the first and second interview were placed on two different tables. Subsequently, another table for the dominant themes extracted from both interviews was crafted in order to reduce redundancies and find the phenomenon.

Once all of the transcripts were coded, the list of coding categories was reviewed and refined, in order to avoid duplication and better organize the themes which emerged from the narratives. Subsequently, I crafted a number of codes that dealt with women facing sexism, racism, invisibility and struggles to find a racial identity for their multiracial children. These codes prompted me to create categories to better explain the phenomenon in study. In addition, I incorporated short sentences to describe what I found, and most importantly, included verbatim statements from the participants to illustrate the recurrent themes. Moreover, I highlighted and color coded chunks of text on the transcript and tables to distinguish the different topics and to make a note of emergent and common themes among participants.

Once I found the emergent and common themes, I went back to the transcripts to verify if there was anything else connected to the themes that I had previously identified. Next, I looked

once again more cautiously for quotes in the transcripts that would illustrate the themes I had identified. Then, a number of formalized themes were grounded in the data, as anticipated, and expressed within the framework of the research question guiding this work.

Synthesized Dominant Themes

After analyzing the three tables with the main topics, I organized the themes into five dominant recurring categories. And as a result of this analysis the dominant themes that emerged from the study were as follow: Impact of racism in the lives of the participants, the impact of sexism in the lives of the participants, factors influencing the participants' decision to choose a particular race indicator for their children, the impact of racial indicators on the educational experience of their children and the awareness of self racial identity as result of having multiracial children (see Figure 1).

In addition, each one of these five dominant themes included other key areas identified in the narratives. In examining each one of these dominant themes and keys, I consistently referred to my research question, oral history methodology, and the study framework as guiding tools to analyze the data.

The impact of racism in the lives of the participants	The impact of sexism in the lives of the participants	Factors influencing the participants' decision to choose a particular race indicator for their children	The impact of racial indicators on the educational experience of their children	Awareness of self racial identity as a result of having multiracial children.
Situated race relations in country of origin	Sexism as it relates to the oppression of women of color	Negotiating racial constructs		
Racial awareness before relocating to the U.S.	Sexism in the form of patriarchy.	Responding to institutions' request for racial labels for multiracial children.		
Dealing with racial construct upon arriving in the United States		Checking monoracial boxes for multiracial children		
Racial interaction and group membership		Racial heritage pride as a racial identity determinant		
Navigating the complex racial landscape of the United States		Becoming aware of multiraciality		
Racism in the form of invisibility				
Resentment as result of racial perception				
Contesting static racial construct				
Breaking the racial conventions and rethinking the color line				

Dominant Interview Themes

Dominant Themes that Emerged from Participant Interviews

1. Racism
2. Sexism
3. Invisibility
4. Pride
5. Racial heritage
6. Cultural heritage
7. Lack of racial awareness
8. Longing for diversity
9. Mother's racial identity for children
10. Sense of not belonging
11. Racial identity impact on education
12. Black/White bipolar racial discussion
13. Racial resentment
14. Multiracial identity
15. Change of perception of racial identity
16. Identity issues

Recurrent Themes

Recurrent themes in these interviews indicated that the phenomenon studied was something which is shared not only among this study's participants but possibly also among a wider group, and therefore I was able to refer to it with more assurance than any phenomenon which stems from the words of only one participant. By stitching these bits of data together, I was able to identify themes not just within the context of each interview or each participant's narrative, but as they contribute to something I perceive as significant to illustrate the struggles faced by these women of color, who are mothers of multiracial children.

Ethical Consideration and Possible Limitations of This Study

Because of my circumstances as a mother of multiracial children and a feminist multiethnic woman living in a multiracial family, the results of this study might be used to support certain perspective of gender, ethnicity, racial identity and education. A criterion for the study was to require participants to be women of color, born outside of the United States; have resided in the country for three or more years; and be mothers of grade school children of multiethnic/multiracial origin currently attending public schools in the Sumter County Schools' district. Thus, women living in monoracial families, or multiracial/multiethnic women born in the United States were not represented in this inquiry. Also, it is fundamentally important that I recognize and attempt to understand the influence that my friendship with these three participants, and my own biases and outlook on issues such as the intersection of race and gender had on my decisions while conducting the study and analyzing the data collected. For example, before conducting the study I expected the accounts of these women's experiences to be stories

of struggles to overcome invisibility of their children and themselves, racism and sexism throughout their lives and educational experiences. However, Janesick (2001), warns that there is no such thing as a value-free or bias-free research. With that in mind, I frequently monitored the study for potential biases by providing an open documentation of my theoretical positions and by documenting and reporting the data rigorously.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the study's philosophical point of reference; I have described oral history as the research methodology, described how I listened individually to the participants, and described the process of interviewing and the crafting of the narratives. I also explained how I transcribed the stories of the participants' life experiences, coded the findings and identified the emergent themes. Further, I presented a summary of the process I went through to build up findings in the data. Additionally, I have described the context of the study. Lastly, I discussed the ethical considerations and possible limitations of the study.

In the chapters that follow I present the participants narratives, the analysis of the findings, the summary of the findings and recommendations for future research. In interpreting the findings I assembled the themes as I looked for patterns and trends in the interviews.

In chapter four I bring forward the stories of the three women by first describing the participants and then bringing in the stories of their lived experiences in their own words. These unmodified quotes from the participants worked to give context to the study, to illustrate the recurrent themes and to support key findings. The narratives were structured according to the dominant themes emerged from the interviews. Subsequently in chapters five, six and seven I

bring in the findings in a way that presents excerpts of the participants narratives embedded in the analysis of the study which worked to help shape their stories.

In so doing, I discussed the findings and described how racism, sexism and invisibility were part of the participants' lives. In addition I presented and discussed the many factors that affected these women's decision to opt for a particular racial label for their children. After identifying all the themes that emerged from the stories told by the participants, I organized the themes into five dominant recurring categories as follow:

The impact of racism in the lives of the participants; The effect of sexism in the lives of the participants; The factors influencing the participants' decision to choose a particular race marker for their multiracial children; The impact of racial identity on the educational experience of their children; The awareness of self racial identity as a result of having multiracial children. Subsequently, each one of these five prevailing themes included other key areas identified in the narratives. Last of all, in chapter 8 I present a summary of the findings and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES

The focus of this study was to gain multiple perspectives of women of color dealing with issues of multiraciality and sexism. As I selected the participants for this study I considered taking the accounts of women of color living and raising multiracial children in the Sumter County area. While it was possible to gather a broad section of experiences from women who were raising multiracial children in Sumter County, I chose to narrow the scope of the study by limiting it to women who, like me, were born outside the United States and are married to men of a different race who were born and raised in the United States. In addition, these three women also presented many other variables relevant to this study.

These three women are from three different countries, speak different languages, come from different educational backgrounds and different socioeconomic levels. The participants, *Maria, Sonia* and *Jane,* are women of color living in the United States, in consequence of a marriage or relationship with a partner of a different racial background who was born in the United States.

In what follows I bring in the three participants using their own unadulterated voices to tell stories of their experiences raising multiracial children, the challenges they face in navigating a new culture, and their effort to overcome racial invisibility for themselves and their children.

Maria

Maria who is in her late thirties was born and raised in Mexico. Maria moved to the United States before she had a chance to finish high school. Upon arriving in Los Angeles, California she attempted to finish high school, but she stumbled on her limited English and the need to work to provide for her. Maria did not give up on fulfilling her dream of getting a high school diploma, so she enrolled in an adult night school to prepare for taking the General Educational Development (GED). Before she completed the program Maria got pregnant and was unable to work full time, care for the baby and attend school. So, she dropped out of school and has not had a chance to return to school.

Maria experienced abandonment and disappointment when her boyfriend (father of her first child) told her that he was not willing to support her and the baby. So, she decided to move to Americus, Georgia in order to be close to other family members and get the support she needed as a single mother. Maria then started to work at one of the local manufactures in Americus. At this manufactory Maria met her present, African-American husband. Maria married and had a son who is now six years old. Both Maria's children – a 13-year-old Hispanic daughter and a 6-year-old multiracial son – attend Sumter County Schools. Both Maria and her husband seem very satisfied with the public schools in Sumter County.

The Impact of Racism in Maria's Life

Situated race relations in country of origin. Maria spoke about race relations in Mexico. Maria*: Yo nasci en Mexico, ahi vivi hasta los desiocho anos. Pero todos son iguales ahi en Mexico. Yo, nunca he tenido problemas en Mexico con la identidad racial, porque como yo*

hablaba bien el espanol en mi ciudad, y ahi todos hablabamos igual, y todos eramos iguales. Y en realidad la gente en México no esta preocupada con estas cosas, porque todos somos de la misma raza. En realidad cuando una persona pregunta sobre su identidad racial, solo preguntan su nacionalidad, o sea, nacionalidad Mexicana. En las escuelas, en otros lugares preguntan: cual es su nacionalidad? Pero no preguntan sobre su identidad racial. No es como aqui en los Estados Unidos, donde siempre preguntan a uno, cual es su raza? Yo no conocia ninguna persona que fuera diferente de mi en mi pais. No mas una vez vino una senora que era de Mexico pero llevaba su esposa que era Salvadoreno. Ella era de Mexico, pero su marido era de El Salvador. Todas las personas in mi pueblo eram de la misma raca.

I was born and raised in Mexico, and I lived there until I was 18 years old. There, no one has racial problems. I have never had any problems with racial identity in Mexico because everyone speaks Spanish in my town, and we are the same. In fact in Mexico no one is concerned about this type of thing, because we are all from the same race. In reality when a person asks about racial identity, they are only asking about one's nationality, I mean, Mexican nationality. In the schools, and in other places, they ask you: what is your nationality? But they don't ask about your racial identity. It's not like here in the United States where they always ask, what is your racial identity? I didn't know anyone from a different race in my hometown. I met one lady that came to my home town as a missionary and her husband was from El Salvador. Everyone in my hometown was from the same race.

Dealing with racial constructs upon arriving in the United States. Maria: *Cuando vino a los Estados Unidos la primera vez, llegue en California. Pero ahí en California donde vivía yo,*

cuando uno sale a la calle, uno mira que las tiendas, los restaurantes, los doctores, todos hablan español. Cuando empecé a ir a la escuela de primero, no me sentía bien porque la maestra hablaba y yo no entendía nada porque hablaba puro ingles.

La maestra sabía hablar español pero no nos hablaba porque quería que aprendiéramos ingles. La maestra que daba clases allá en California era una mujer Americana [blanca]. Yo me llevaba bien con ella porque ella siempre nos trataba bien, y trataba de explicarnos bien lo que teníamos que aprender. Yo tenía amigas que sabían un poquito más y nos decían como, y así. Yo fui a esa escuela no mas por seis meses, y allá quede embarazada de mi hija, y entonces salí de la escuela y empecé a trabajar. Yo tenía 19 años cuando salí embarazada. Y así íbamos aprenderlo, pero cuando nos hacia exámenes para pasar a un grado más grande [era una escuela de adultos] y todos éramos mayor de edad .Y cuando nos hacían exámenes y yo contestaba y siempre pasaba a un grado más alto. Así que yo iba aprendiendo el ingles, pero como allá uno no necesita el ingles, porque todos hablan español entonces uno no sabe platicar el ingles. Y cuando ya vino a hablar más ingles fue cuando mi novio de California vino para Georgia.

When I came to the United Sates for the first time, I arrived in California. In California where I lived, there is no need to speak English, because everyone speaks Spanish, so it is hard to practice speaking English. When one goes out, one finds that the stores, doctors, restaurants, everyone speaks Spanish. When I first started in the adult school, I did not feel good because the teacher spoke and I did not understand. Our teacher in California was a White-American woman. But it helped me to be promoted to another grade. But in California one does not need English

because everyone speaks Spanish, so one does not know how to practice English. When I came to Georgia, and when my boyfriend came to Georgia, that's when I learned to speak a little bit more English.

Racism in the form of invisibility. María: *Pues lo que yo he visto es que, mira que yo tengo familia hispana, y nosotros hacemos las cosas diferentes, el en cambio el la hace diferente también. Pero miro que las personas aquí viven en sus grupos de racas, o sea, no se mesclan mucho. Pois esto es distinto de lo que he mirado en mi país. Las miro diferente, o sea ellos hacen las cosas diferentes. Hasta el lenguaje es diferente. Mi esposo tiene unos amigos que son de aquí, pero están casados con mujeres mexicanas, entonces a veces nus juntamos para hacer comida, o para celebrar algo, y ahí mezclamos las racas, las comidas. Pero todo igual, no miramos ningún desprecio. Yo, o sea, estuve muy sorprendida con la manera como la gente de diferentes racas no se llevan. Yo he tratado de aprender cómo la gente se lleva.*

See I have Hispanic family here, and we do things differently. People here in the United States do things differently, they don't mix with other races, and even the same English they speak is different. But we are all equal, no discrimination. My husband has friends that are married with Mexican women, and then we mix the races, mix the food. But we see each other as equals, we don't undermine anyone. I mean, I was always surprised to see how people from different races don't get along. I try to learn about the way people get along.

Racial interaction and group membership. María*: Yo voy a la iglesia católica, ahí la mayoría son hispanos, pero algunos son hueros e morenos. Pois, yo me llevo bien con ellos, pero mira que nuestras culturas son distintas. En el trabajo también me relaciono con personas*

morenas y hueras. Pero ahí en el trabajo, casi no hay hueros, la mayoría son mexicanos y morenos. Los hueros trabajan así en la oficina, y de supervisores. Mientras nosotros y los morenos trabajamos en la producción. Yo me relaciono mejor con los morenos and espanos porque estamos en el mismo nivel.

I go to the Catholic Church, and they have some blacks there, but the majority is Mexican. In my job I relate with people that are Black and White, but I notice that their culture is different from mine. But the Whites work as supervisors while the Hispanics and Blacks work as laborers. So, I relate better to the Blacks and Hispanics because they are on same level that I am.

María: Pero algunos morenos dicen que nosotros los espanos, les estamos quitando el trabajo. Yo no se, no los quiero discriminar, a uno. Pero ya vez que, cuando entra una persona nueva, nosotros los espanos tratamos de ayudarles, a ensenarles como hacer las cosas, mientras los morenos no les gusta ensenar nada. Las morenas que trabajan ahí, ni a su propia gente les gusta ayudar. Porque como, a veces contrata gente. Yo creo que las hispanas están más dispuestas a ayudar a las demás, porque saben cuánto cuesta llegar a los Estados Unidos, y lo difícil que es encontrar un trabajo. Las hispanas se no tienen trabajo, no tiene como obtener ayuda del gobierno, en cambio, las morenas si pueden ir aplicar para desempleo y estampilla de comida.

Los hueros, a veces tratan de ayudar un poco, pero muy pocos trabajan en la producción. Hay unos pocos de morenos que trabajan en las oficinas. Los mexicanos trabajamos en la producción, porque no nos graduamos de la escuela y no sabemos usar las computadoras.

Y los morenos no se gradúan de la escuela. Mi esposo es Moreno y se graduó de la high school, y el es el "plant" mánager.

But you see, some Blacks say that we, the Hispanics, are taking away their jobs. Usually when they hire someone new, we, the Hispanics try to help the new person, try to teach them the job, but the Blacks do not want to help even some new Black employees coming in. I don't know, I don't want to discriminate against anyone. I think that the Hispanics know how hard it is to get here and find a job. If we don't have a job we can't get government assistance. My husband is Black, but he has a high school diploma, so he works as a plant manager.

María: La familia de mi esposo es morena pero en realidad lo que mi familia España no hace para ayudarme, la de mi esposo lo hace [que son todos morenos] me lo hace. Yo conocí mi esposo en el trabajo, yo tenía casi dos años trabajando ahí cuando me junte con él. Pero nunca he tenido ninguna preocupación con la diferencia racial entre yo y mi esposo. El es muy bueno comigo.

My husband's family is all Black. His family is also very nice to me. But in reality they are nicer than my own Hispanic family. I met my husband at work. I have not had any concern for our racial differences. He is very good to me.

Situated racial awareness and the construction of difference. María: *A veces la diferencia entre la familia de mi esposo y la mía se me hace difícil. Pero a veces si es fiesta familiar ahí si el va y dice "yo me voy con usted por un ratito porque es una fiesta de su familia. Otra diferencia es que en navidad la vez que celebramos el veinte-cuatro en la noche, y la familia de mi esposo lo celebra el veinte-cinco en la mañana. Entonces mi esposo siempre está conmigo en navidad a la*

noche, pero en la mañana vamos a la casa de la mama de el, y ahí celebramos con toda su familia en Plains.

Sometimes these differences between my husband's family and me are difficult for me. My husband does not like to go to the "bailes." But sometimes if it is a family party, then yes, he goes and says, "I am going with you for a little while because it is your family party." Another difference is that we celebrate Christmas on the twenty-fourth in the evening, and my husband's family celebrates on the twenty- fifth in the morning.

María: A nosotros los hispanos tenemos costumbres diferentes como parejas que otras familias de una sola raza. Un ejemplo, mi esposo no le gusta ir a los bailes mexicanos, no le gusta bailar como nosotros los mexicanos. Y por decir case le gusta todas las comidas mexicanas que hago, pero ya ve que a nosotros nos gusta la comida un poco picante pero a el no le gusto el picoso, o sea la comida picosa de México. No le gusta las sodas mexicanas tan poco. Y pues, es así la diferencia, o sea son dos culturas distintas en una misma casa, en una misma familia. Y a veces se nos hace difícil para juntar las dos culturas.

You know, sometimes I see differences between my multiracial family and other non-multiracial families, because the Hispanics have different traditions than couples of one single race. One example, my husband does not like to dance or go to the Mexican dances; he doesn't like to dance like the Mexicans. But he likes the Mexican food that I cook. But you see, we Mexicans like spicy food, but he doesn't like spicy food from Mexico, and he doesn't like the Mexican sodas that we drink. You see, this makes the difference, in other words, there are two

cultures in one house, in one single family. It sometimes makes it difficult to blend the two cultures.

Pero aun somos diferentes, la familia de el nunca me hecho un desprecio o discriminado a me, así por ser hispana. A veces cuando nosotros vivíamos en Plains, su familia venia a visitarme miraban haciendo comida, y siempre decían, "hay huele rico," yo les preguntaba, "quieren?" Y decían si y comían la comida y ahí decían "oh, qué rica, es su comida" Pues yo lo miraba como una aceptación de mi cultura. Mi esposo me enseno a cocinar la comida que ellos comen, entonces yo la hago en la casa. Yo cuando voy a la casa de ellos, siempre me invitan a comer la comida que hacen.

Although we are different from each other, his family has never undermined me or discriminated against me because I am Hispanic. Sometimes when I lived in Plains, his family would come to visit and would see me cooking Mexican food and they would say, wow, it smells good, and then I'd say, please have some. And then, they'd eat my food and they would say, wow, your food is delicious. Well, I saw that as an acceptance of my culture. My husband taught me to cook the food that they eat, so I cook it at my house. His family always invited me to eat at their house.

The Impact of Sexism in Maria's Life. María: A veces pienso en mis sobrinas y yo, pues ellos en parejas van a las fiestas, a los bailes y voy a las fiestas pero solo con mi hija y mi hijo, porque a mi esposo no le gusta ir a los bailes. Mi esposo no me prohíbe nada, me déjà ir a los bailes, y pues me dice que me porte bien y ve adonde quiera, o sea no mi dice "Oh non vayas a esto o aquello."

Sometimes I think about my nieces and I, well, they go to the Mexican parties as couples, but I go only with my son and my daughter because my husband doesn't like to go to parties. My husband doesn't prevent me from going to the "bailes", he says, you can go, and behave yourself wherever you go, I mean, he doesn't say, "oh don't go or this or that."

La diferencia entre yo y mis sobrinas es que los esposos de ellas son un poco celosos y controlan sus esposas, y ya vez que mi esposo no es celoso. El no más me dice "date tu lugar y se va a bailar, baila apenas con tu familia." A mí no me gusta estar controlado por mi esposo, yo lo respecto, lo quiero, pero también deseo que me lo da el respecto. El dice que la confianza es lo primero.

The difference between me and my nieces is that their husbands are jealous and controlling, and you see my husband is not jealous, he only says, stay in your place, go to the "bailes" dance, but dance with your family members only. I don't like to be controlled by my husband, I respect him, I love him, but I also want him to respect me. He says trust comes first.

Factors Influencing Maria's Decision to Choose a Particular Race Indicator for Their Children
Responding to institutions' request for racial labels for multiracial children.

María: *Mi hijo y mi hija nacieron aquí en los Estados Unidos. Pues, yo digo que ellos son hispanos. Pero en realidad a veces no estoy segura de que identidad racial escoger para mi hijo, porque mi hijo es una mezcla de hispano y Moreno. Y además de esto yo soy la que llena los formularios en la escuela, pero creo que si fuera mi esposo que llenara los formularios, con seguridad el marcaria que el es moreno.*

I identify both my children as Hispanic. But sometimes I wonder about my son's racial identity, because he is a mix of Hispanic and Black. I am the one who completes the school's forms, so I choose to label them as Hispanic. But I would guess that if my husband was the one completing those forms, he would probably choose Black as the racial identity for my children.

María: Significa un orgullo muy grande de mi hijo, yo miro que él es diferente, es muy bonito, muy inteligente, y es capaz de hablar dos lenguajes, es capaz de llevar las dos culturas, y esto lo miro muy bonito, muy especial, estoy muy orgullosa de mi hijo y hija. A mí me gusta escuchar las maestras cuando dicen que yo tengo un niño muy especial, y muy inteligente. Mi hijo es muy feliz, y esto me hace muy feliz. Si, ellos en la escuela saben que mi hijo es hispano, yo no estoy segura si lo llaman de hispano o de Africano-Americano o de Mexicano-Americano.

It means a lot to me. I am very proud of my son, he is different, he is beautiful, he is very smart, he speaks two languages, he knows two different cultures, and it makes him very special. I love listening to his teachers praising him, and saying that he is very smart. My son is very happy, and it makes me happy. Yes, they ask me about my son's racial identity, but I am not sure if they classify him as Hispanic, African American, or Mexican-American.

Cultural currency as a factor. María: *Para la familia de mi esposo, ellos miran mi hijo como Africano-Americano. Mi familia hispana, miran a mi hijo como hispano, aun que su español sea un poco diferente del español de mi familia. Porque la familia de mi esposo siempre cuido a mi hijo después de la escuela, el ha aprendido mas el ingles y las costumbres de la familia de mi esposo. Pero a veces me pongo confundida porque no estoy segura de que*

identidad racial tiene mi hijo. Yo lo quiero mucho, y quiero que todos lo quieran. Quizás el es Mexicano-Americano, porque mi esposo es Americano.

My husband's family chooses to label my son as African American, while my Hispanic family chooses to label my son as Hispanic. Because my husband's family always took care of my son after school, he has learned more English and the customs of my husband's family. Sometimes I get confused, because I don't know what racial identity to choose for my son. But I love him, regardless of his racial identity. Perhaps he could be labeled as Mexican-American because my husband is American.

Racial heritage pride as a racial identity determinant. Maria: *Yo he escogido una identidad racial para mi hijo, que me parece mejor, y por supuesto, escojo hispano porque es mi raza, y porque estoy muy orgullosa de mi raza hispana. Pero también tengo miedo por mi hijo, porque miro que es mas difícil ser un hombre moreno, de que ser un hombre hispano. Yo miro que la vida es muy difícil para los morenos, porque muchas personas blancas son racistas y no les gustan los morenos y los espanos. Sí, yo miro que lo tratan mejor por ser hispano. No sé cómo lo tratarían se yo escogerá la identidad de moreno. A veces miro que las personas tratan mal a los niños morenos, dicen que no saben se portar, que no les gusta la escuela o cosas así. Yo tengo miedo por mi hijo, mucho miedo.*

I chose Hispanic as his racial identity because it is my race and because I am very proud to be Hispanic. But I confess that I am very scared to label my son African-American, because I see that it is a lot more difficult to be a Black man. Life is too difficult for Blacks, because the Whites don't like Blacks and Hispanics. Yes, I see that they treat him well because he is

Hispanic. But I don't know how they would treat him if I have chosen to label him as Black. Sometimes I see that some people don't treat the Black boys well because they think that the Black children don't know how to behave, that they don't like school and things like that. I fear for my son, I really do.

María: Tengo mucho orgullo de ser hispana, y por eso mis hijos son espanos. Pero también mi esposo habla bastante español, lo entiendo bastante, porque yo lo he ensenado a hablar español, y el ha hecho muchos amigos con la gente que habla español en el trabajo. Mi hija y mi hijo también hablan los dos lenguajes muy bien, pero a veces tengo que decirles como pronunciar algunas palabras en español. Pero tengo mucho orgullo de mis hijos por hablar dos lenguajes. Esto es muy bueno. Pero quiero comprar libros en español para que todos en mi familia aprendan a leer y escribir español, yo quiero que sepan mi cultura, tengo mucho orgullo de mi cultura hispana.

I am very proud to be Hispanic, and that's why I labeled my children Hispanic. But my husband also has learned to speak a lot of Spanish, because I have taught him to speak Spanish, and he has made friends with other Hispanic people. Both my children speak English and Spanish. I am very proud of them for knowing how to speak two different languages. This is really good. But sometimes I have to correct them; I have to teach them how to pronounce the words. I would like to purchase some books in Spanish, so my whole family can learn to read and write in Spanish. I really want my children to know my culture, I am very proud of my culture.

María: Mi hija empezó la escuela aquí en Georgia. Nos mudamos para Georgia cuando ella tenía un-ano y medio. El papa de ella es de México. Pero después, yo mi junte con mi esposo, y el es moreno de aquí de los Estados Unidos. Mi hija siempre va de vacaciones con su papa en California. Ella tenía tres anos cuando empezó a ir a la escuela aquí en Sumter County. Pero nunca he sabido de problemas con una maestra que me ha hablado de un problema de discriminación. A veces unos niños llaman los Mexicanos de mojados, pero no las maestras, y dicen que nosotros los mejicanos debemos regresar a nuestro país, oh nos dicen que somos los ilegales, los indocumentados. Pero no nos gusta pelear con esas personas, aun que somos legales aquí en los Estados Unidos.

My daughter started school here in Georgia. We moved to Georgia when she was only one and half years old. Her father is from Mexico. But later I started living with my husband, he is Black from the Unted States. My daughter alwasys go on vacation with her dad in California. She was only three years old when she started schools in Sumter County. I don't recall any racial problem that my children might have had as result of racial discrimination at school. Sometimes kids call the Mexicans wet backs, but I don't think the teachers would do that. At times, they say that we should go back to Mexico, or that we are illegal, undocumented. But I don't like to fight with these people, even if we are legal U.S. citizens.

Maria's Awareness of Self Racial Identity As Result of Having Multiracial Children

María: Pues cuando yo estaba solita en la comunidad hispana, no me preocupaba mucho con esto de identidad racial, pero cuando estoy en la comunidad de mi esposo, y me comparan con mi hijo, y con la familia de el, entonces si miro que mi identidad racial es mas fuerte. O sea miro que soy diferente de mi hijo. Y entonces miro que es bueno ser hispana, y entonces tengo mucho orgullo de ser hispana. A veces cuando estamos mirando futbol entre los Estados Unidos y México, yo siempre voy por México, y miro que ellos saben que cada día estoy más fuerte en mi orgullo de ser hispana. Yo miro la diferencia entre yo y mi hijo, somos el mismo, pero somos diferentes. Somos de la misma raza, pero también somos de razas distintas. Pero aun así yo lo quiero mucho. Es mi hijito.

Well, before my son was born I did not even think about issues related to race, but after he was born I have to be constantly thinking about his racial identity, and it forces me to also think about my own racial identity. And the more I think about it, the more I am proud of being a Hispanic woman. When we are watching a soccer game between United States and Mexico, they see how proud I am of being a Hispanic woman. I see that we are different, but yet we are similar. We are from the same race, and we are from a different race. But I still love him. He is my little boy.

Jane

Jane is a 31 year-old single mother of two boys, 12 and 10 years old. Although Jane was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, her parents were both born and raised in India. She is fluent in English and Gujarati (a language spoken mainly in the Western part of India). In trying to escape overt racism in South Africa, Jane's family moved to the United States when she was only 6 years old. Her family moved to a diverse community in San Jose, California where she first learned that contrary to Johannesburg South Africa, people did not use separate public places based on the color of their skin. Six months later, her family moved once again. This time they moved to Americus, Georgia where Jane attended public school for a year, before transferring to an all-white private school. After high school Jane moved to Athens, Georgia, where she attended the University of Georgia.

After becoming pregnant with her first child and experiencing domestic abuse from her husband, Jane moved back with her parents. However, hoping that she could still save her marriage, Jane decided to return to her husband and, as a result, had another child. But the domestic abuse did not go away, and Jane then with two little children decided to put a definite stop to the violence, and returned to her parents' house. While living with her parents and raising her two boys (ages twelve and eleven), Jane earned a master degree in business at Georgia Southwestern University.

Situated race relations in country of origin. Jane: I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa. And of course in South Africa you see a lot of racial lines. Basically, when I was growing in South Africa, you were either White or Non-White. If you were Non-White like I was, you

were limited to where you could go. I remember an incident when I was about 6 years old, we were in a mall in Johannesburg and I needed to use the restroom, but we were in the White side, so we had to go all the way to the other side to use the Non-White restrooms. I was very young, but that humiliating experience really stuck in my head, I don't know why. Both my parents were born and raised in India, but chose to move to South Africa in search of a better life. Although, I was born in South Africa, my racial and cultural background is Asian- Indian. So while growing up I was immersed in Indian culture, Indian religion, Indian food, etc. but growing up in South Africa, we saw the Dutch (the Whites), and of course we saw the different native tribes such as the Zulus, and many other groups.

Racial awareness before relocating to the U.S. Jane: These groups of people [Native Blacks] used to come to town and work. We used to have some of them work for us. And of course we knew that there was a difference between the White and Non-White people. So we felt discriminated against. So, one reason why my parents uprooted us and moved to the United States, was so that we could have a chance to grow up in an environment in which we could be afforded the opportunity to have a better life, as equals regardless of our race. One of the reasons why we moved was because of the racial issue. But we also moved because of safety reasons, because South Africa was becoming very dangerous.

Jane: I went to an all Indian school. We had classes in English in the morning and classes in Gujarati in the afternoon. In the Gujarati classes we also learned about our culture and Indian values. There were several different groups of Indians, such as Muslims, Hindus. But in the back of my head, I knew that the Whites were somewhat superior to us. And of course even in the

Non-White communities, the racial lines were evident, because the lighter the color of your skin, the better position you had in society. It's not like anyone told me about these differences, but it was implied that the lighter your skin, the better your position in society.

Dealing with racial constructs upon arriving in the United States. Jane: When we first came to United States, we moved to San Jose, California. So, when I went to school the first time in San Jose, it was a shock to me, it was so different, I didn't know what to do, or how to react to it. There were all sorts of people, Whites, Blacks, Asians, Africans, Middle-Eastern, I mean, all kinds of people. The children spoke different languages, had different customs, different behavior, I mean, very different. I was at complete loss, because the other children noticed that my accent was different [South African accent], I was afraid they wouldn't accept me. At that school I interacted with all sorts of kids, but drew closer to an Asian friend, I think she was from China, I am not sure. We did not stay too long in California, after about six months we moved to Americus, and went through yet another cultural shock. It was awful. The racial diversity in Americus was limited to Blacks and Whites.

I remember that I was in the fourth grade and did not have many White friends. My closest friend was an African American girl. I had a lot of difficulty understanding the way they spoke, and they had difficulty understand the way I spoke, because they thought that I spoke too fast, and I thought that they spoke too slow. I was so used to seen only Indian people in the area we lived in South Africa. It was very different having to interact with people from different cultures and races. And of course the difference between San Jose, California and Americus Georgia was enormous, because in Americus we saw only Black and White people. The majority

of people at Cherokee Elementary School were Black, my teacher was Black, and my closest friends were Black as well. It is strange, because some people in Americus would classify me as White, and others would classify me as Black. So, I never felt I had a specific racial identity, like the Blacks and Whites have. Teachers would often ask me if was either Black or White, and my response was that I was Asian-Indian. My parents would always mark Indian while responding to racial identity questions.

But while making friends, I always tried to see people for who they were. I was particularly blind to racial differences, and sincerely tried to see the person for what she or he was. But I was constantly reminded of racial lines; by the way people treated each other. For example in the fourth grade I really clicked with an African American girl and we became good friends. So, because I became friends with an African American girl everyone assumed that I was also African American. So after the fourth grade my mother put me at a private school [Southland Academy]. Southland had been established only ten years earlier, so I believe that I was the first Non-White student enrolled at Southland. Kind of felt weird to be honest with you, especially with my name, it was so different, so hard to pronounce. My culture was so different, my race was different.

I know that Southland was created as a means to resist desegregation in the early 1970s, so I felt weird walking there, and evidently the other kids had the curiosity and interest to know where I was from. They always wanted me to speak, they loved my accent, and they loved feeling my hair. But I also sensed that some kids thought that I did not belong there. But one friend invited me over to a birthday party. I still do not know why my parents chose to enroll me

at Southland. I am not sure if it was because of the level of education, or if it was because there were mostly Black students at Cherokee Elementary School. But my parents left my brothers at public schools.

While I was attending school at Southland my teachers would ask me to talk about my culture, and at times invite my mother to speak to the class. And the same thing happens today with my own children. Teachers ask my children, me and my mother to speak about our culture.

Actually I am very proud to let people know about my culture. I would not force my culture on anybody, but you know, we live in a very narrow-minded town. There is so much more to the world than South Georgia. So I think it is beneficial that people learn about other races and other culture. And I would hope that by learning about other cultures would help people in this area to be more tolerant and kin to diversity. In the Sumter County area, there is so much of the Black and White thing, you know, that people do not realize that there are other races. I don't know, that's what I think.

Racial interaction and group membership. Jane: I try not to let the race issue affect my decisions, or whatever, because you know, I have black friends that still this day talk about white people have this, white people have that, and, I mean, they still feel deprived, and the white people feel the same way, they think that because the others are Black, that they have more opportunities. So, sometimes I think that they think way too much on what race they are. I mean, I think that is not all about race, it is about who we are as persons, ultimately we are all equal. I don't dwell too much on who I am, but at times at work people think that I am White, while others think that I am Black. People don't think of me as being Indian. The fact is that they don't

see me as anything else other than Black or White, it is as if my race was invisible. And depending on the convenience of the situation, they embrace me as one of them, or reject me. I think that if I was with my ex-husband, I might deal differently with the race issue. Perhaps if his family was involved in our lives, people would be more curious about, and willing to define my racial background differently.

Becoming aware of multiraciality. Jane: I don't think I have the perspective of other monoracial families. In fact, in a way, although, we are a multiracial family, we have predominantly adopted Asian-Indian culture. My situation is a bit unique because my husband and I have not been together since my boys were babies. We live with my parents, in an Asian-Indian cultural context. But of course my children have also adopted United States' customs and culture. But, really we are Asian-Indians and we lived as Asian-Indians. The food, the customs, I mean, everything, really.

The impact of sexism in Jane's Life: sexism in the form of patriarchy. Jane: My perspective, or the way I was raised, the man is the dominant figure, the bread winner, whereas my ex-husbands' experience was a little bit different. For starters, his parents were not together for too long. His mother was a single mother, so he also grew up without the presence of a father. So, he was very insecure. He was very smart, and was successful in everything that he did, but for some reason he felt threatened by my sense of confidence and also he felt threatened by comments that other people made about me. I don't know, it was strange, it was difficult.

One thing that disturbed me about the comments made by some people back then, his friends, you know, was that they always complimented me based on my physical appearance. So,

I always wanted to ask them: “why don’t you ask about my intelligence, I’ve got a brain, you know?” I want to be complimented by my capabilities, you know. It really bothered me. Umm! But I was so attracted to my ex-husband, he was so good looking, so charming, so successful, and all of that drew me to him. Sometimes, I am aggravated by the way people deal with the race issue, because I try to see people for who they are, and some people instead feel either superior, or inferior to someone else based on their race. I choose to get along with everyone, regardless of their race. You know, that’s how I felt about his friends.

As I grew older and faced dating and socializing issues, things became a little more difficult, first because in my Asian-Indian culture, girls are not supposed to date, we are meant to marry a husband of our parents’ choices. But, I was allowed to go to the prom with a guy who was an Asian-Indian friend of the family.

My husband and I met through a common friend. We were initially just friends, for about three years. At the beginning of the relationship everything was good and romantic, and then the more we got to know each other, the more we could see that maybe it was not meant to work, we were together for roughly 7 years.

He was very jealous and possessive, if anyone looked at me, he would be asking “why are they looking at you?” My ex-husband was very possessive and controlling. He wanted to control everything that I did. And that caused us to get in arguments, and he would verbally abuse me, and it escalated to physical abuse, and it became really bad for me and the baby. To be honest with you, if it wasn’t for my baby boy, I would probably be dead, because there were instances in which he avoided hitting me just because I had the baby on my arms. So, after that, I

decided to leave him and move in with my mother. I wanted to live to raise my son. But you know, I felt guilt for not giving my son a chance to grow up with a father, so I returned to my husband even knowing that he probably would abuse me again. And in fact it didn't take long before he was verbally and physically abusing me again. And once again I was pregnant, so that time I decided to leave him for good.

I was living the lowest point of my life, my self-esteem was so low. At that point I did not have much contact with my family because they were disappointed that I didn't marry an Asian-Indian man in a pre-arranged marriage style. My parents wanted me to marry a lawyer or doctor, and it was fine with me, but I also wanted to have a say on such important aspect of my life, you know. So, I swallowed my pride and returned to my parents' house here in Americus.

Factors influencing Jane's decision to choose a particular race indicator for her children. Jane: I have been asked many times to choose a racial label for my children and myself as well. And I usually pick Asian-Indian. And I am used to it, because I grew up where you had to pick race too. And really, I do not want to be consumed by what race I am, or what race my children are, I just want them to grow up to be good citizens, to be good people.

I have seen some African American students being really mistreated, and I do not want that for my boys, so I prefer to label them as Asian-Indian, I don't know, that's my perception. I think that things may be more difficult for my children if they were labeled African American. I know that there is a perception of Asian-Indians that is acceptable in certain groups, and I prefer for my boys to be labeled as Asian-Indian and pass the impression of being committed to

education, I know it is just a perception too, because anyone can be anything they want. But in reality people assume that Asian kids are more motivated to do well in school.

I guess with my situation, since I am not with the dad, so, their dad has no communication with the boys whatsoever. I mean, he is not present in the boys' lives at all. So, my boys only know my culture which is Asian-Indian culture. Because you know, we live with my parents, so they know my side of the family, they know my Indian culture. Both my boys met their dad when they were little. But they don't remember him now. He lives in Atlanta now. In the past he had asked to see the boys, and I have made some attempts to meet him half-way in Macon Georgia, but sometimes he wouldn't show up. So I stop making attempts to take the boys to him. I wanted the boys to have as much of a normal family as possible. I wanted the boys to have a dad, but the dad did not want to cooperate.

As far as I know, the boys do not know their dad's racial background, and they have not had any interest in knowing, they have not questioned me or anyone else about their dad. I don't have any problems telling them about their dad's racial background, but I will not force it on them. If they come to me, if they want to know about their dad, then it is fine, I'll tell them.

Racial Heritage Pride as a Racial Identity Determinant. Jane: I am very proud of my racial background, so I am always happy to identify myself as an Asian Indian. That's what I am, an Asian-Indian. But you know, here in the United States I still have to explain to people that I am an Asian-Indian, and not let's say a Native American. And I am very proud to label my children Asian-Indian, that's what they are also.

The impact of racial indicators on the educational experience of Jane's Multiracial children. Jane: Sometimes I wonder why my children are not chosen for some activities at school, or if they are chosen to participate as well because of their race and their ethnicity. So, many times I have asked myself if perhaps they would have been chosen if they were racially labeled as Black, White or any other single race.

Everyone has cliques in this area, so I often wonder why I was not invited, or why my children were not invited. Could it be because of the fact that my children do not have a specific race? Other times I wonder if my children are discounted because I am a single mother of young boys. For example, a couple of weeks ago the school had to choose one student to be awarded a scholarship, and my son was not awarded that particular scholarship, but a White girl was chosen. So, I started to wonder if race had anything to do with it. But you know, even if my boys are multiracial, I always mark them as Asian-Indian, because their dad [who is a mix of Jamaican and African American] is not involved in their lives at all. They have embraced my culture, and whatever values I teach them. I teach them to be tolerant and accepting of everyone, regardless of who they are.

In reality, I wished the choice of any particular racial identity would not make any difference, on the educational experiences of my children, but I think that it really does, it really does, because you know, at school they group all the races in separate bundles, and they expect more or less from the children based on their racial identity. For example, hum, I'm trying to not be crude, but I might come across as biased, you know, when they talk about African American children, they think of them as… or the perception that African American children are not so

smart, and that's sad that people think like that. Some people might think that African American children are not as interested in education, you know.

Jane's awareness of self racial Identity as result of having Multiracial children. Jane: I'm not sure that the fact that my children are mixed-race makes any difference to me. To be honest with you they are just my kids. Really I have never thought of them as being more than one race, they are just my kids, I just could not label them as half this, half that, I just see them for who they are, they are just my boys, regardless of race. I don't think it makes any difference for me. I am who I am, regardless of my children's racial identity. I don't know, I have never thought of that.

Sonia

Sonia, a mother of two children, in her late forties, was born in Brazil and raised in Paraguay. It was in Paraguay that Sonia met and married a White man who was born and raised in the United States. As a result of this marriage Sonia moved to the United States in the early 1990s.

Sonia has a bachelor's degree in interior design and foreign affairs, but has worked mostly as a flight attendant. She speaks several languages fluently including English, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian. In order to spend more time with her family she decided to quit her job as a flight attendant, and now works as a yoga instructor at a local health club. As a result of a previous romantic relationship with a Paraguayan man, Sonia also had a daughter who is now 13 years old. According to Sonia, her daughter does not have any relationship with her biological father.

If one does not know the racial background of Sonia's two children, one would assume that they are White-American. Both Sonia's children attended school at Sumter County public school until this year. Sonia's frustration with the school system's emphasis on punitive measures led her to enroll her daughter at a home-school based program at Koinonia Farm. Her 11-year-old son however, still attends a Sumter county public school.

The impact of racism in Sonia's life. Situated race relations in her country of origin.

Sonia: My mother was born and raised in Paraguay but lived some time in Brazil, and my father was born and raised in Argentina but later lived in Paraguay and Brazil. In both Paraguay and

Brazil, I was raised in communities that had a mix of European descendants and native Indians. Although I was born in Brazil, we lived for many years in Paraguay.

I was growing up in Paraguay, there were two racial groups, the native Indians, and the descendants of Europeans, and in my family everyone was identified as descendants of European. So, I use to choose the Latin-European label. But you know, race was definitely not an issue in Paraguay. No one was concerned about labeling themselves as any particular racial group, we were all Paraguayans.

I was not very concerned about racial differences before moving to the United States. You know, because my background is Catholic, for some reason we didn't talk too much about race. So I was not too concerned about racial issues. And I think that this lack of awareness about race and racism, kept me from exploring my own racial identity. And I think that this lack of awareness, was there in part because, we did not have the habit of comparing races. It is good, you know, that we are having this conversation because it helps me to think about my own situation. I mean, I am a woman from a race that does not fit your typical racial description in this community. When I lived in Paraguay sometimes, we had some Native-Indians come to the house to do work, and we could see that they were racially different from us. They had straight dark hair, big beautiful black eyes and a darker complexion.

You know, I really did not have any concern or awareness of racial struggles before coming to the United States. I knew that the socioeconomic situation determined how you perceived and were perceived by others, and it impacted the way people were treated, and it also

impacted the way I was treated, because I was of European descent. But you know, Gera, we were not concerned about how the Guaranis felt. And it is sad, you know, it really is.

But, the instructions from my parents were always to treat them with respect, regardless of how they were dressed, spoke, or looked like. My parents knew all too well that Paraguayans and Brazilians have a history of not treating Native-Indians well. So, we can say that everything is ok in Paraguay and Brazil, because you know, if we are from the race considered superior, it is easier to not be concerned. Nowadays they are not treated as bad, but people act as if the Native-Indians in Paraguay were invisible, they are totally indifferent and oblivious to the Indians' needs and concerns.

I had a small connection with the native Indians, but not as much as I would like to have had. As I was growing up, my father had a close friend who was a Guarani Chief. I remember that he would come to the house, and we would listen to him speaking because we saw in him a person of a lot of wisdom. My father often asked him for suggestions and help on how to solve certain problems. Although society saw him as a member of an inferior racial group, in our family we saw him as someone of enormous status and wisdom, who could influence many important decisions in my family. My father really trusted him with some important decisions, you know. He gave my father some good advices on a lot of important things.

Dealing with racial constructs upon arriving in the United States. Sonia: You know Gera; none of my personal experience with race prepared me for the shock of the racial divide I found in the United States. And in my point of view this situation is worse in Georgia than it is in Florida and Washington D.C. where I lived previously. Here in Georgia when I first came, I saw

racism in all directions. Whites against Blacks, Blacks against Whites, and the other races simply been ignored, as if they were not there at all. But when I lived in the Washington D.C. area I had a good number of friends of Afro descents, but they did not have the same level of resentment that I often see in the African American community

Race as a confounding issue. Sonia: Well, most people are surprised to hear that I am Latina, because I do not look like your typical Latina. Most people think that I am from Eastern Europe, or Russia. People in this area think that I look different, and because of that, they treat me differently. Both White and Black people. But, it is interesting to see how Blacks seem to feel more at ease and relaxed when they learn that I am not White. To me it is as if they feel like I do not offer much threat to them, I am not sure why. But the fact is that they seem to open up more, they are more engaged in conversation than before they learn that I am a Latin-American woman.

On the other hand, the Whites seem to react the opposite of the Blacks, because once they hear my accent, I think that they realize that I am not one of them, and it causes them to become more reserved and less trusting. But you know, I do not really care about what they think, because my life goes on regardless of their opinion of me and my family. I care more about being able to communicate and provide for my family. But I really sense that Whites want to ask me what I am doing here, why I came to United States. I am so used to it now, that I do not care about it anymore. They all wonder if I am here with Habitat. But when I mention that my husband has a business affiliation with a very influential family in town, then, they seem to feel

more at ease with me. However, when I mention that my children go to public school, then, the Whites seem to pull back and start showing a lack of interest in me and my children.

Contesting static racial construct. Sonia: I wish this area was a bit more diverse, not only for me, but for my children as well, because I want them to know that there is so much more out there. I want them to learn to be tolerant. I envy you, because you have a chance to take your kids to Brazil and other places, and it gives them an advantage on world perspective, it makes them more tolerant. I would like to take my children to India someday. I hope they learn to see people for who they are, I mean, I hope my children learn to be tolerant.

But you know, when Whites discriminate against me like that, I want to make friends with African Americans. But these relationships have also disappointed me, and everything, you know? I see that Blacks in this area do not want to be related to Non-Blacks, regardless of the color of their skin, or cultural background. Basically, I had a couple of very good friends who were African American, but they were not from the South, they were from the Northwest where race relations are less bitter. So, the difficulty to find friends in this area for my children has been overwhelming at times, and that is one of the reasons why I would like to move to an area that has less racial conflicts.

I like to know more about other races, I want to make friends with everyone, you know. Most of my friends are Latin-American, but I also have friends from all kind of races. I have some friends that are White, but it makes me sad that I have not been able to make good friends in the African American community. I have a very good African American friend. He is a professor at Georgia Southwestern University, and likes the same things that my family and I

like, such as soccer, Brazilian culture, etc. I feel that he is not afraid to make friends with people from other races. But most Black people that I know are not willing to make friends with me or my family.

Breaking the racial conventions and rethinking the color line. Sonia: Incidentally, I would like to tell you a story; do you see that picture on the wall? Well, my husband's great-great-grandfather was a pharmacist up North, and he lived in this big house with a big basement, and that basement was used to hide and give shelter to slaves traveling North on the underground railroad. So, my husband's family has a history of trying to establish good relationship with people of another race, and it makes me happy, you know, that my children can talk about race in a positive light.

Situated racial awareness and the construction of difference. Sonia: I am so proud and happy to have multiracial children. They have a more open mind, a broader perspective of racial issues. It is like their vision of race and culture is more elastic, it stretches beyond one single race, because they understand many cultures. And it makes me very happy and proud, because that's how I grew up. We were very interested in many different cultures and races. But I also don't think that they are superior, or better than other people just because they are mixed, I don't want them to be arrogant about it. I don't want them to feel that way, you know.

Of course my experience of living in a multiracial family is different from monoracial families. It is different because my family is not isolated in one race or one culture, and stuff. But at the same time, we struggle to have people understand the uniqueness of our family, the beauty of our family. Being in a multiracial family gives me and my children the opportunity to jump

from one culture to another very easily. We can be both; we act in both cultures very easily. I have always been interested in multiculturalism, different religions, different ethnic groups and culture. I think that is why I become a flight attendant, and perhaps that is why I married a man from a different race than mine.

So, sometimes, I think that maybe I should mark them as multiracial rather than just Latin-American, because they are mixed; they are a mix of two great cultures. It is interesting, because we are here discussing this, you know, I have not thought much about labeling them as multiracial. But I think that now that I see it this way, I want to think positive. I want to label them as multiracial, rather than just Latin-American, because they are multiracial, they come from these two great cultures. I like this discussion very much. You know, my husband is a very proud American. But he is always telling them that they have an advantage, they will have more knowledge and experiences. They would have more opportunity for scholarship, because they are mixed-race, they know two cultures; they speak more than one language.

So, this is not something that is coming just from me, it is coming from both parents. We try very hard to emphasize both cultures. For example when we have visitors that speak only Spanish, we try to encourage our children to interact with the visitors in Spanish, and learn about their rich heritage. When we have friends that speak only English, we also try to encourage our children to speak English and interact with them, learn from them. And, so, our goal is that, you know, they learn from both cultures so they can become more accepting of everybody.

So, my children are a combination of races, where am I going to put them? And worst, they are always discussing only the problems of Blacks, and Whites. They don't think about

discussing any other race, they think that theirs is only Blacks and Whites. You know, I always ask my husband if he knows why the Blacks and Whites are always arguing about their races and ignoring other races.

But I have never met dark skinned people that are as angry as the African Americans; I don't understand it very well. I guess I don't understand the history of race relations very well here, you know. But it is sad to see the level of distrust and resentment found in the African-American communities in this area. Of course I understand that Black Americans have been humiliated and dehumanized for centuries, and it has resulted in this mistrust of people from another race. I know that in Paraguay native Indians do not feel this way after being brutalized by European colonizers, so the racial relationship there is different from here. I don't know, I am afraid of discussing it, I am afraid of offending someone. You know what I mean?

Sexism

Sonia: My oldest child was born in Paraguay and the youngest was born in the United States. My oldest child has a Paraguayan biological father, and my youngest has a North American father. My oldest daughter's father had a mental problem, and was psychologically and verbally abusive to me. So, I decided to leave. He still threatens my family in Paraguay in order to pressure me to give him parental rights. My oldest child does not care to meet him, and his pressure makes her to strength her relationship with my present husband.

Factors influencing Sonia's decision to choose a particular race indicator for her children

Responding to institutions' request for racial labels for her multiracial children. Sonia: I have been asked to choose a racial label in one of those school forms. And I had to pick a race

for my children. But you know, at first I was like, why are they asking me that? This is a private matter, the way I choose to label my children is a private matter, why does school need to do that? And then, they only had boxes for White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American and other. What is this with other? Are my children other?

But I always choose Hispanic label. The fact that I am the mother, I spend a lot of time with them, and I try to influence them, and they are very proud of their Latin-American roots. But they also enjoy the United States' culture. I mean, we try at home to have them aware of the positive and negative side of both cultures. Having them learn about both cultures will hopefully help them be better people and everything.

Racial heritage pride as a racial identity determinant. Sonia: When asked about my racial identity here in the United States, I often label myself as Latina. I am very proud of my racial background. I am a mix of some European groups in Paraguay, and I am proud of my heritage, you know. But we also know that the Europeans were not so nice to the natives, and that part of my heritage I don't like. But here in the United States I feel very comfortable and at home in the Latino community, because I am a Latina. Both my children have very light skin and blond hair, so when some people get to know that they are a mix of Latina and white American, they say things such as: "Wow, your children are beautiful" or "Wow, they do not look Hispanic" or "mixed-race children are gorgeous" or you know, "really! They look like normal American kids" [as if the American standard for race was White]. It bothers me. Really! So, I am raising my children aware of the positive and negative of both races. Learning and embracing the cultural aspects of both races.

The Impact of racial Indicators on the educational experience of Sonia's Multiracial children. Sonia: Well, maybe because they are labeled Hispanic people assume that they don't speak English, that they don't understand the language. So, sometimes this choice makes it a little bit challenging because of that. You know, I don't know, maybe because I am from another culture they think that my kids are not ready to adapt to the culture, I don't know. Like you know, when my children are at school, and we speak another language, the other kids pick on my children, and start saying that they don't understand it. And that makes my children feel uncomfortable, makes them not want to be at school sometimes, and that might, you know, make my kids not to do well in school. Another example, in my culture we show affection a lot with hands, our body, we make noise with our lips when we give the traditional two kisses on the cheeks, and that makes my children feel embarrassed some times, because their friends at school think that it is funny. So you see, it makes them not to want to go to school at times, and that's why I am homeschooling my oldest child now. But the youngest is still at Sumter County Elementary School. But, because I come from a multicultural background, my kids see that I am right in pushing them to adopt more than one culture, to learn to be accepting, right? You see, my children travel a lot, they have the opportunity to see other cultures, so when they see other people that are afraid of different culture, they think it is wrong, they think that they should distance themselves from friends that are not as tolerant.

It is almost as if it is a disease to have your children enrolled in public school. It is very sad, but I think that they act this way towards public school because the majority of the students in Sumter County are African-American. At times you can clearly see that they do not want to be friends with you just because you have children in public school. It is very hard here to be in

Americus. A lot of times I have people ask me why I want my children involved with African Americans. They claim that the African-American children do not know how to behave, that they have bad manners, that they are not interested in education. To me those are all excuses to hide that they are racist people that do not like Blacks.

Sonia's awareness of self racial identity as result of having Multiracial children. Sonia: My experience and perception of race have changed a lot. First because, you know, I got a degree in foreign police and diplomatic affairs, and I also have had the experience with different races by traveling to several African and European countries as a flight attendant. In these experiences, you know I have met and related to people from all kinds of races. I traveled extensively to different countries in Africa, and I had many dark-skinned friends. I still do.

But you know, while I am wondering about my children's racial identity, I am also thinking, well, what is my real racial identity in the mind of these people? I am always wondering because I say, well, I guess I don't belong here, because I am not part of the Black and White disagreement. Then, I think, well, if I am not White, I am not Black, in this culture I don't exist. There's something missing, I don't know. And that makes me wonder about my place in this community, my racial identity. But yesterday, I stopped at a fast food place, and this girl was so curious about my culture, about my accent, it really made me feel good, made me feel accepted. You know, I want my children to be proud of being racially mixed, but I don't want them to be arrogant about it, but I also do not want them to feel insecure or inferior to other kids that come from one single race, I don't want them to have lower self-esteem because they are

Multiracial. But I want them to be aware of their racial identity and also of the racial identity of their parents.

Sonia: Well, maybe because they are labeled Hispanic people assume that they don't speak English, that they don't understand the language. So, sometimes this choice makes it a little bit challenging because of that. You know, I don't know, maybe because I am from another culture they think that my kids are not ready to adapt to the culture, I don't know. Like you know, when my children are at school, and we speak another language, the other kids pick on my children, and start saying that they don't understand it. And that makes my children feel uncomfortable, makes them not want to be at school sometimes, and that might, you know, make my kids not to do well in school. Another example, in my culture we show affection a lot with hands, our body, we make noise with our lips when we give the traditional two kisses on the cheeks, and that makes my children feel embarrassed some times, because their friends at school think that it is funny. So you see, it makes them not to want to go to school at times, and that's why I am homeschooling my oldest child now. But the youngest is still at Sumter County Elementary School. But, because I come from a multicultural background, my kids see that I am right in pushing them to adopt more than one culture, to learn to be accepting, right? You see, my children travel a lot, they have the opportunity to see other cultures, so when they see other people that are afraid of different culture, they think it is wrong, they think that they should distance themselves from friends that are not as tolerant.

The stories told by these three women provided examples of how racism and sexism was and still is part of their everyday lives. These stories also offered illustrations of how different

aspects of sexism, racism, heritage pride, and racial invisibility have been a part of their lives, and influenced the choices of racial indicators for their multiracial children. There was sufficient indication from the stories of these three participants that the racial identity indicator of their multiracial children and the consequences of these choices, provided a more significant set of anxiety than the concerns these three women had for their own gender and racial identity issues. In the chapters that follow, I offer my interpretation of the findings followed by excerpts of the interviews with the participants.

CHAPTER 5

RACISM

The stories told by these three women in this study are both alike and unique. Wing (1997) points out that as critical race feminism attempts to improve race and gender relations, it draws from a great variety of experiences and perspectives as it also tries to understand how practice and theory join. Moreover, Wing (1999) highlights other factors that make critical race feminism appropriate for this study as she points out that critical race feminism also reflects on other characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, color, class, sexual orientation and identities, age, disability, religion, language, minority status and immigration status.

This aspect of critical race feminism was fundamentally important as I examined and tried to understand the distinct stories of these three women whom are all women of color. These women come from different countries, speak different languages, have different educational backgrounds, have distinct religious beliefs, and dwell in dissimilar social contexts. Thus, in amassing the lived experiences of these three participants the oral history methodology supplied the means for collecting and preserving these distinct personal stories (Morrison 1987). These women's stories are alike in their struggles to comprehend and navigate the complex racial landscape of their adopted land, often facing uncertainty, racial discrimination, and sexism. They are unique because each one of them tells specific elements of struggles as they particularly try to fit in, navigate the host culture, and provide their children with a meaningful education.

A number of dominant themes emerged from the interviews. In what follows, I bring in these themes for analysis, which addresses the findings from the three participants' narratives.

After identifying all the themes that emerged from the stories told by these three women, I organized the themes into five dominant recurring categories.

The impact of racism on the lives of the participants

The impact of sexism on the lives of the participants

Factors influencing the participants' decision to choose a particular race indicator for their children

The impact of racial indicators on the educational experience of their children

Awareness of own racial identity as result of having multiracial children

Each of these dominant themes includes other key areas identified in the narratives. While examining them, I consistently referred to my research question and study framework as guiding tools to analyze the data.

In piecing together the stories of the lived experiences of these three women, stories of, struggles, uncertainties, sexism, racism, invisibility, strength and pride surfaced. These three women and I left our countries of origin with a firm belief that life would be better not only for ourselves, but for our children as well. What we found after immigrating to the United States pleased and surprised us.

Two of the participants came from previous experiences that did not accentuate racial awareness, while the other one came from a legal and habitual segregation experience. I came from an experience in Brazil that consents to a perceived "racial democracy" and racial hierarchy, depending on who is claiming this argument. Nonetheless, the range of racial labels in

Brazil is more fluid than in the United States. Degler (1986) points out that a "comparison of race relations and slavery in Brazil and the United States is not, as is sometimes said, a matter of polar opposites – Black and White" (p. xviii). Degler (1986) posits that the key to understanding the differences as well as the similarities in race relations in the two countries is someone between Black and White – that is, a Mulatto. Degler (1986) explains that in Brazil the Mulatto is not considered a negro, whereas in the United States due to the persistent "one drop rule" the Mullato is a negro.

Contrary to the United States, Brazil never really developed the distinct color line. And most people (including some of my family members) viewed the increase in multiracial population in Brazil as a result of these perceived harmonic racial relations between the descendents of Europeans (mostly of Portuguese, Italian, German and Dutch descent) and the Indigenous Brazilian and those of African origin. However, this indistinguishable color lines and harmonious race relation in Brazil at times proves to be nothing but a myth, because in the end, White Brazilians continue to enjoy the most privileges afforded to White skin people. In fact the tenets for social status and opportunity in Brazil continues to be 'the Whiter, the better.' Consequently, the darker the individual, the lower she is in the social order in terms of opportunities, prestige, education, occupation, and income, despite of the lack of legal barriers to equality (Daniel 2006). Although Brazil has recently crafted important, punitive anti-racist legislation, Brazilian society still consents to some sort of implicit prejudice that not everyone in Brazil is ready to acknowledge is evident in the Brazilian society.

I am a product of this race dynamic. Born and raised in a multiracial family, it was difficult for me to confront the covert racism in my family and in the community where I grew up. Three of my grandparents were direct descendants of Europeans, while my mother's father was the son of a slave. Therefore, six of my half-siblings have blond hair and blue eyes, while my mother has three darker skin children and three very light-skinned children.

Despite the perceived harmonic racial relations in my family, I often heard jokes that were racist and derogatory about my mother and her three dark-skinned children. However, although I witnessed these acts of prejudice in my family and my community, charging my family members with racism, demanding changes in attitudes, and fighting against my own family members was very complicated. For example, it was very common for people in my family and my community to call dark-skinned people "neguinha" (little nigger). When confronted, they insisted that this term was purely affectionate and meant no harm. However, I perceived this term to be racist and pejorative, and I would often ask people not to refer to me as "neguinha" for I was indisputably the darkest of the twelve siblings, and felt undermined and disrespected when called "neguinha."

However, people in my family and the community in general disregarded my concerns, arguing that I was too politically correct, and they often accused me of not being able to take a joke. Some of my family members even claimed that my contentions were the result of leftist ideologies' influences in my life. But some chose to take my concern seriously, and stopped referring to me or other people as "neguinha." Those who chose to take me seriously and learn to be aware of covert racist acts, have also learned to fight for other social justice issues in Brazil.

These circumstances mentioned above, makes me distinctly different from the other two Latin-American participants, for they did not experience the harsh realities of racism. Whereas, similar to Jane, I had substantial experience dealing with racism before moving to the United States. However, my experience with racism also differs from Jane, because my exposure to racism was subtle, and I was not segregated from other races, whereas Jane lived in a legally segregated society. Thus, I feel that this experience equipped me with the tools to navigate the challenging racial landscape of the United States. And in so doing, I have developed the skills to detect and resist racism.

Nonetheless, regardless of our differing experiences of racism and sexism, all four of us find ourselves living and raising our multiracial children in the United States. A country that persistently struggles with racial challenges that are neither as harsh as South African apartheid, nor as democratic as the Brazilian experience. Nonetheless, as a result of these struggles and challenges in the United States, we see racism shape the life and experiences of our multiracial children, and affect our life experiences and opportunities on many fronts. Racism and sexism continue to be a source of concern and apprehension for me. However, since the women in this study have spoken of racism as their major source of apprehension, the theme of racism is the first to be examined in this chapter.

The Impact of Racism in the Lives of the Participants

In telling the stories of how they have struggled to position themselves and their children in the United States racial landscape, participants demonstrated time and again that race relations presented a significant source of anxiety for them. As a result, this angst caused racism to

become indisputably the most dominant theme that emerged from this study. The evidence found in the quotes from participants demonstrated that the salience of racism appeared throughout all the interviews in varying degrees of complexity.

What is racism? Banks (2003) explains that racism is a belief that human groups can be authentically clustered on the basis of their biological individuality, and these particular groups inherit certain mental, personality, and cultural characteristics that determine their behavior. Bennett (2003) adds to this debate about racism by drawing on the subject of oppression to portray racism as a systematic subjugation through persistent behavior that is the result of personal prejudice and racial discrimination within societal structures. Bennett (2003) adds that racism is an action or rule that harms or suppresses members of a racial group. If the depiction of individual racism seems convoluted at times, the argument in Bennett (2001) is that institutional racism is even more difficult to recognize than individual racism. Bennett (2001) explains that the difficulty in recognizing this type of racism is due in part to the fact that in institutional racism the prejudice is embedded in policies and practices that have generally become accepted as natural or ordinary over time.

Through the participants' accounts, I found out that there is sufficient evidence from the stories of these three women that confirms consistent occurrence of institutional racism at their children's school, in the workplace, and the larger community. But one aspect of racism that particularly troubled all three participants of this study was the sense of inherent superiority displayed by White-Americans. These participants demonstrate throughout the interviews that

they perceive the professed superiority of Whites and the alleged inferiority of Blacks as a predicament that forces other races into obscurity.

King (1997) concedes that in fact, whether we like it or not, the United States is still a racist nation. Evidence from the participants' narratives indicates that while this argument remains important to the race relations debate in the United States, for them racial injustice and inequality will not recede unless we understand that racism is not static, but rather a more fluid phenomenon.

For these three women, the racial debate should also involve people from racial backgrounds that are informed by experiences that go beyond the confining binary view of race. Perhaps that is why, Appiah (1996) contends that "there is a danger in making racial identities too central to our conceptions of ourselves; because while there is a place for racial identities in a world shaped by racism, if we are to move beyond racism we shall have, in the end, to move beyond current racial identities."(p. 32). In discussing the insidious nature of racism, bell hooks (1995) assert that nonetheless, "if we all pretend racism does not exist, it never has to go away" (p. 4). These arguments provided here offer the means for understanding how racism is perpetuated in the United States' culture, and how it impacts the participants in this study, particularly as race and gender issues intersect.

Situated Race Relations in Country of Origin

Racial awareness in our country of origin was an important theme evident in these narratives. Two of the participants gave accounts of significant lack of racial awareness before moving to the United States. Consequently this lack of racial awareness while growing up, kept

Maria and Sonia from exploring their own racial identity. They demonstrated that growing up surrounded by people of similar racial background made it effortless and safe to relate to one another in their community. Consequently, narrative analysis revealed that both Maria and Sonia did not realize how this lack of racial awareness would affect their understanding of racism, privilege and how it impacted their lives.

While discussing her upbringing in her country of origin, Sonia explained that although her parents were originally from two different countries, and she was raised in two distinct countries, she was not impelled to think about her racial background and the privileges that came with it. In her country of origin she chose to identify with the dominant racial group – descendants of Europeans.

> Sonia: My mother was born and raised in Paraguay but lived some time in Brazil, and my father was born and raised in Argentina but later lived in Paraguay and Brazil. In both Paraguay and Brazil, I was raised in communities that had a mix of European descendants and native Indians. Although I was born in Brazil, we lived for many years in Paraguay.

Sonia's lack of racial awareness is replicated in Maria's account as she engages in denial of racism in Mexican society. Maria explained that she did not grow up interacting with people from different races. She noted that she lived in a context in which everybody had the same racial characteristics, spoke the same language and shared the same traditions. Her lack of racial awareness was so obvious before moving to the United States, that upon meeting another Hispanic woman from El Salvador in her little pueblo, she thought that the Salvadorian woman

was from a different race. Perhaps this lack of awareness is there in part because unlike places such as the United States, South Africa and Brazil, racism in Mexico has never been framed by a legal system.

In Mexico, where race is not as distinctive as it is in the United States, racism is largely inconspicuous. However, most Mexicans define ideal beauty and acceptability as being fair and light-skinned. Carrillo (2002) argues that there is indeed racism in Mexico, and the real victims of discrimination and racism in Mexico are the impoverished Indians.

However, the perception of privilege for Maria is directly connected with her ability (or inability) to speak English. For Maria, language discrimination has a bigger impact in her life than race discrimination. Thus, when asked about racism she promptly refers to language as the means of acceptance and equality or as the means of discrimination against her and her family. Maria did not seem to have an understanding of the differences between race, culture, language skills and nationality. This misconstruction caused Maria to use these terms interchangeably. Mattar (2004) explains that the process of choosing or embracing ethnic labels is common among immigrants who come from countries where nationality, rather than race, is emphasized as a major identity descriptor. Upon arriving in the United States, immigrants become "the other," which is the first blow to their identity. In what follows Maria demonstrated her understanding of discrimination, and how uncontested her experience with race was in Mexico.

> *Maria: Yo nasci en Mexico, ahi vivi hasta los desiocho anos. Pero todos son iguales ai en Mexico. No, nunca he tenido problemas en Mexico con la identidad racial, porque como yo hablaba bien el espanol en mi ciudad, y ahi todos hablabamos igual, y todos eramos*

iguales. Y en realidad la gente en mexico no esta preocupada con estas cosas, porque todos somos de la misma raza. En realidad cuando una persona pregunta sobre su identidad racial, solo preguntan su nacionalidad, o sea, nacionalidad Mexicana. En las escuelas, en otros lugares preguntan: cual es su nacionalidad? Pero no preguntan sobre su identidad racial.

I was born and raised in Mexico, and I lived there until I was eighteen years old. There, no one has racial problems. I have never had any problems with racial identity in Mexico because everyone speaks Spanish in my town, and we are the same. In fact in Mexico no one is concerned about this type of thing, because we are all from the same race. In reality when a person asks about racial identity, they are only asking about one's nationality, I mean, Mexican nationality. In the schools, and in other places, they ask you: what is your nationality? But they don't ask about your racial identity.

In contrast to the other two participants, that had relatively uncontested racial relations in their country of origin, Jane experienced intense racism before moving to the United States. Although, Jane is a daughter of Asian-Indian parents, she was born and raised in the state-sanctioned segregated society of South Africa. Thus, she was raised on the fringes of a state sanctioned racially charged context. She lived in an environment that was surrounded by many different types of races, but due to apartheid rules, her family lived in what was characterized as a very isolated and segregated racial and social context. Thus, the account of her experience with racism is distinctly different from those of the other two participants.

Jane: I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa. And of course in South Africa you see a lot of racial lines. Basically, when I was growing in South Africa, you were either White or Non-White. If you were Non-White like I was, you were limited to where you could go. I remember an incident when I was about six years old, we were in a mall in Johannesburg and I needed to use the restroom, but we were in the White side, so we had to go all the way to the other side to use the Non-White restrooms.

Racial Awareness Before Relocating to the U.S.

Again, even though two participants professed that they were unaware of racial disparities in their country of origin, one of them was still able to capture the covert intolerance when it came to acknowledging other races. Sonia somehow understood that it is easier for the descendants of a prevailing racial group to take the racial blind approach and say that everyone is equal and that race does not matter since they do not have to contend with discrimination on a daily basis. Yet, Sonia seemed to be unaware of the fact that in most situations privilege is reserved for the White descendants of Europeans. In addition, she is also unaware of the fact that this approach, in which one does not have to think about race on a daily basis, is decisively ingrained in White privilege.

Sonia: I was growing up in Paraguay, there were two racial groups, the native Indians, and the descendants of Europeans, and in my family everyone was identified as descendants of European. So, I use to choose the Latin-European label. But you know, race was definitely not an issue in Paraguay. No one was concerned about labeling themselves as any particular racial group, we were all Paraguayans.

Thus, Sonia affirms that the lack of diversity as she was growing up made it easy for her and her family to deal with racial issues. Although they tried very hard to monitor their behavior and perception of the Native-Indians, they still viewed other races as exotic, different, and exciting. In other words, Sonia's family viewed people of other races as a novelty. She explained that she did not feel threatened by other races and did not feel that she posed any threat to the natives Indians. It is ironic that throughout the interviews Sonia complained of blatant racism in the United States, but she found it difficult to recognize and acknowledge racism and discrimination in her country of origin. Perhaps her position of racial privilege kept her from understanding the systematic exclusion, exploitation and marginalization of minority communities and indigenous people in Paraguay. For instance, a study conducted by the Organization of American States (2001) on the situation of human rights in Paraguay – addressing specifically the rights of indigenous people – contend that the indigenous population in Paraguay continues to live on the margins of society. The report adds that the indigenous population still endures horrible living circumstances to the point that it could amount to an assault on the dignity of the human person. Although Sonia is able to some extent to detect some of this oppressive reality, she is not fully aware of all the challenges faced by the Indigenous people in Paraguay.

Hence, Sonia's experiences account for her unquestioned racial acceptance in the Paraguayan society and a significant lack of racial awareness. In this next statement, Sonia talks about her experience with race and, in a rather contrite manner, acknowledges that her lack of racial awareness while growing up in Paraguay and Brazil, kept her from exploring her own racial identity.

> Sonia: I was not very concerned about racial differences before moving to the United States. You know, because my background is Catholic, for some reason we didn't talk too much about race. So I was not too concerned about racial issues. And I think that this lack of awareness about race and racism, kept me from exploring my own racial identity. And I think that this lack of awareness, was there in part because, we did not have the habit of comparing races.

On the other hand, Sonia reports that, while living in Paraguay and Brazil, she was relatively aware of class distinction, and was also aware of the social differences between Guaranis and the descendants of Europeans. However Sonia maintains that she was not aware of how the lack of racial awareness had impacted her life. She is not shy in acknowledging that her family and community were often oblivious to the oppression endured by the indigenous people. Perhaps an explanation for Sonia's perception of race relations in her country of origin lies in the dynamics of the European conquest and colonialist approach.

> Sonia: You know, I really did not have any concern or awareness of racial struggles before coming to the United States. But you know, Gera, in Paraguay we were not concerned about how the Guaranis felt. And it is sad, you know, it really is.

Sonia insisted on explaining that she was raised to have respect for everyone, regardless of their racial background. Even so, she was able to capture the covert intolerance when comes to acknowledging the Native Indians, particularly the Guaranis – for the European descendants treated the Guaranis as if they were invisible. She understands that it is easier for the descendants of Europeans to say that race does not matter because they are the dominant racial group.

Language is an important marker of social status in Paraguay. The descendents of European and members of the upper class speak Spanish in public and in private, even if they understand Guarani. The Indigenous people on the other hand, speak Guarani.

> Sonia: You know, the instructions from my parents were always to treat them with respect, regardless of how they were dressed, spoke, or looked like. Nowadays they are not treated as bad, but people still act as if the Native-Indians in Paraguay were invisible, they are totally indifferent and oblivious to the Indians' needs and concerns.

In Paraguay Sonia had limited interaction with other races. She tells me that, the approach taken by her parents was to have respect for the Native-Indians, and to recognize their value. In our conversation Sonia explained that parents would often make an effort to display acts of tolerance and acceptance towards Guaranis. As Sonia talked during the interview, she would take the time to construct her responses, almost as if she was taking the time to reflect on the questions and her response in a way that she had not done before. In doing so, Sonia had a chance to make sense of her situation of privilege in Paraguay in a way that she had not detected before.

> Sonia: Well, I had a small connection with the native Indians, but not as much as I would like to have had. As I was growing up, my father had a close friend who was a Guarani Chief. My father often asked him for suggestions and help on how to solve certain problems. My father really trusted him with some important decisions, you know.

There is a significant difference in these three women's accounts. Whereas Maria and Sonia had limited racial awareness while growing up in their country of origin, Jane for her part,

lived in an environment that emphasized racial divisions, and it drove Jane to be conscious of the ruthless racism in South African society. Eventually Jane's family moved away from South Africa due to difficulties with overt racial discrimination. Thus she arrived in the United States already predisposed toward seeing distinctive racial lines.

> Jane: These groups of people [Native Blacks] used to come to town and work. We used to have some of them work for us. And of course we knew that there was a difference between the White and Non-White people. So we felt discriminated against.

Jane demonstrated that Apartheid in South Africa worked to separate different races and to give numerous privileges to those of European descent. The Afrikaners (mostly of Dutch, English and German descent) were the dominant group. But these Afrikaners also struggled over economic and political power. But Jane also understood the racial stratification the South African society. And she was located in the middle of that stratification, for the Asian-Indian did not have political power, but enjoyed some economic power. At the bottom of the racial hierarchy were the Indigenous Africans.

Jane acknowledged that racial discrimination in South Africa is insidious and pervasive throughout the society. As a result South Africans lived in an environment in which segregated neighborhoods, segregated places of worship, schools, hospitals, public services and facilities, were common practices. Consequently, Jane was forced to attend segregated Asian-Indian school, segregated places of worship and social context. She was aware of, and understood the racial stratification and perceived the racial tensions between the different races, supporting the Whites' sense of superiority.

Jane: I knew that the Whites were somewhat superior to us. And of course even in the Non-White communities, the racial lines were evident, because the lighter the color of your skin, the better position you had in society. It's not like anyone told me about these differences, but it was implied that the lighter your skin, the better your position in society.

Dealing with Racial Constructs Upon Arriving in the United States

All three women in this study had specific language for describing racism, and all three of them had some measure of understanding of racism and its outcome for people of color. However, it was really upon arriving in the United States and witnessing structural racism and racial discrimination that two of them, and I, began to realize the pervasive and systematic nature of racism in the United States. This structural racism according to Lawrence and Keleher (2004), is viewed as the most persistent form of racism in the United States, because all forms of racism emerge from structural racism. This argument resonates well with that offered by Delgado (1993) as he contends that structural racism contributes to a class system, in which the United States' society has a vital interest in controlling. This structural racism impacts social mobility, (Delgado 1993) employment, housing, education and interracial contacts of minority group members.

This pervasive nature of racism in the United States was particularly challenging for Maria and Sonia because their experience with racism indicated that the racial divide in their country of origin was not as insidious as they are in the United States. These two women to some extent expressed concern about the United States tendency to measure one's own racial merit by

rejecting other races. Sonia and Maria felt that their experiences of being raised in a monoracial community in their country of origin, initially led to their lack of interest in racial issues in the United States.

For instance, upon relocating to the United States, Maria moved to a heavily Hispanic community in which she seldom saw anyone that did not speak her language, or share her culture and racial distinctiveness. In consequence, there was not much pressure to learn English, or to embrace the cultural aspects of the host culture. Thus, these circumstances did not help Maria to foster any racial awareness, or to fully engage in the United States' culture.

Due to the fact that the Brazilian society did not have a legally encoded racial segregation, I also had difficulty understanding the harsh racial divide of the United States' society. Marx (1996) explains that slavery and colonialism established the pattern of early racial discrimination in Brazil, United States and South Africa. However, because Brazil did not have a racial conflict – such as Jim Crow and apartheid – to resolve after abolition, no official domination was constructed. Nevertheless, Black Brazilians still face subtle discriminatory racial practices. Before moving to the United States I experienced and fought covert racist practices first-hand in Brazil. This experience with racism in Brazil helped to equip me with the tools to better detect and understand the devastating impact of racism on the daily lives of people of color– particularly as race and gender intersect – in the United States.

Navigating the Complex Racial Landscape of the United States

Participants talked about their difficulty in understanding and navigating the complex racial landscape of the United States. Two women felt that their limited experiences dealing with

racial divides in their country of origin, did not prepare them for racial challenges that they stumbled upon in the United States. All three participants arrived in Americus after having experienced other parts of United States. Similarly all three of them told me that racial tension seemed to be more critical in the state of Georgia (particularly in a rural area such as Sumter County) than in California, Washington D.C. and Florida.

Unlike the three participants, when I came to the United States, I first arrived in Americus. I also arrived with some measure of awareness of the degree of racism in the United States. My experience with social justice issues was fostered mostly by my involvement with the Methodist and Catholic churches. Thus, when I was told that I could not attend a White Methodist church in Americus, I thought that my friend was referring to the color of the walls of the church building, not the color of the skin of people attending the church. It was at that moment that I realized that perhaps I had much to learn about the nature of racism in the United States. And it was in this context that I met my husband – of White-European descent – and started a relationship that would result in our marriage. We have not experienced overt racism as result of our interracial marriage, but we have captured people's perplexity and stares when they see us together, particularly with our children. However, when people realize that I am of Latin-American descent, they seem to be less alarmed. But, we still face strange questions about the make-up of our family. For example, after five years working with a particular teacher, upon looking at the picture of our family, he asked if my children were from my husband's first marriage (both Wayne and I have been married only once). The fact that our sons are light-skinned makes some people assume that they are not my biological children.

The difficulty in understanding and navigating the complex U. S. racial landscape is demonstrated in this next excerpt. Sonia talked about her discontent with the seemingly inevitable invisibility of all races that are not within the binary Black and White racial discussion. Although this assumption has some validity to it, Sonia's limited understanding about the struggles and discrimination faced by African Americans leads her to think that African Americans are simply unwilling to have any association with her because she is not Black.

> Sonia: But none of my personal experience with race prepared me for the shock of the racial divide in the United States. But when I lived in the Washington D.C. area I had a good number of friends of Afro descents, but they did not have the same level of resentment that I often see in the African American community

Conversely, coming from a racially charged context, Jane for her part was stunned to see how people from different races interacted in California. Reys et.al (2001) posit that California is one of the most ethnically diverse and complex populations in the world. This reality impelled Jane to significantly change her perception of racial identity. She had not experienced such confusing racial landscape before moving to the United States, so she did not know what to do or how to respond to it. In California, she saw for the first time that the racial interaction could be different from what she had experienced in South Africa. In California people did not use segregated public places based on the color of their skin. In what follows Jane further expands on the surprise she encountered upon arriving in the United States.

> Jane: When we first came to United States, we moved to San Jose, California. So, when I went to school the first time in San Jose, it was a shock to me, it was so different, I didn't

> know what to do, or how to react to it. There were all sorts of people, Whites, Blacks, Asians, Africans, Middle-Eastern, I mean, all kinds of people. The children spoke different languages, had different customs, different behavior, I mean, very different. The racial diversity in Americus was limited to Blacks and Whites.

Upon arriving in Americus Jane became keenly aware of the differences between herself and her new classmates. She was, once again, forced to learn the local racial connotations and racial relations in a way that was new to her. In Americus the racial struggles revolved squarely around the bipolar Black/White debate. Thinking that she did not belonged to either side of the debate, Jane felt once again confused about race relations in the United States. She was not alone because other people in Americus were also confused since they had difficulty defining her racial identity. This difficulty resulted in more challenges blending in with yet another culture and its races.

> Jane: I had a lot of difficulty understanding the way they spoke, and they had difficulty understanding the way I spoke, because they thought that I spoke too fast, and I thought that they spoke too slow. And of course the difference between San Jose, California and Americus Georgia was enormous, because in Americus we saw only Black and White people. The majority of people at Cherokee Elementary School were Black, my teacher was Black, and my closest friends were Black as well. So, I never felt I had a specific racial identity, like the Blacks and Whites have.

What is special about Jane is that contrary to the other participants, her experiences suggest that her previous familiarity with racial segregation provided her with an easier path to

understand and adapt to the racial categorization in the United States. Jane's account shows that her parents were fairly familiar with the need to choose a racial label, and they would gladly choose a racial box to identify themselves as Asian-Indian.

Jane explains that, regardless of her past experiences with race, she chooses to be tolerant towards racially different people. However, she expressed concerns for the way other people labeled her. What is ironic in this assertion is that Jane's family familiarity with racism through the prism of South African society prompted them to not want to be associated with races that were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in the United States. Thus, her family did not want to be labeled or associated with involuntary minority groups such as Black or Native-American.

A defining moment in Jane's life came when her mother enrolled Jane at an All-White private school. This was not any private school, but actually one of those All-White religious private schools that had been created as a result of defiance of the 1964 Civil Rights Acts to desegregate schools. Racism seemed inescapable for Jane because once again, she was in a situation in which she had to contend with being different and not fitting in. Jane demonstrated that things were not easy in the All- White School, since she had difficulties adapting to the way racial issues were perceived at the All-White school. So, at the onset she had a sense that she did not belong at the All-White private school. In a quest to belong and avoid discrimination, Jane reported that although she did not feel fully accepted at her new school, she accepted the other children's curiosity about her racial characteristics. But she once again complains about the restrictive aspect of the binary racial discussion in her new school. Jane explained that her friends at school, puzzled by her looks, would often ask her whether she was Black or White.

> Jane: But while making friends, I always tried to see people for who they were. I was particularly blind to racial differences, and sincerely tried to see the person for what she or he was. But I was constantly reminded of racial lines; by the way people treated each other.

Jane continued to reflect on other people's perception of her racial identity during the interview. She seems to be fine with people's curiosity about her race. But she did not seem to be aware of the fact that she was perceived as a novelty, as someone exotic. In addition she was not aware of the fact that racial tokenism was at play when the administrators allowed the first Non-White student in their All-White ranks. Although she understood the underlying racism in her new school, she was unable to understand the racial dynamic of the Sumter County area.

> Jane: While I was attending school at Southland my teachers would ask me to talk about my culture, and at times invite my mother to speak to the class. And the same thing happens today with my own children. Teachers ask my children, myself and my mother to speak about our culture.

For her part Maria's experiences of living in a culturally segregated community with minor distinction from her racial surroundings, led to her feeling some measure of security in relating to other people in the Californian communities. In her account when she first moved to California she was not required to speak English, because most people in her newly adopted community spoke Spanish fluently. Whether going to church, to a restaurant, to stores, or to the doctor, Maria frequently encountered people speaking Spanish and sharing her cultural heritage. In consequence, she did not feel the need to learn English, or to embrace the full spectrum of the

cultural aspects of the host culture. Thus, these similarities did not help Maria to foster any racial awareness, or to fully engross in the United States' culture.

> *María: Pero ahí donde vivía en California cuando uno sale a la calle, uno mira que las tiendas, los restaurantes, los doctores, todos hablan español. Así que yo iba aprendiendo el ingles, pero como allá uno no necesita el ingles, porque todos hablan español entonces uno no sabe platicar el ingles. Y cuando ya vino a hablar más ingles fue cuando mi novio de California vino para Georgia.*
>
> In California where I lived, there is no need to speak English, because everyone speaks Spanish, so it is hard to practice speaking English. When I came to Georgia, and when my boyfriend came to Georgia, that's when I learned to speak a little bit more English.

Racial Interaction and Group Membership

Root (1996) posits that many studies place multiracial individuals into a dualistic view of the world where membership and allegiance is limited to only one group. The participants in this study experienced difficulties understanding their racial locations while interacting with groups of people that were limited to the Black/White binary. These three women had varied experiences relating to people that are racially different from them. All three of them professed the desire to gain the trust of other racial groups and to relate to everyone equally regardless of racial identity. They explained that work and school contexts provided the biggest source of contention while dealing with racism.

However, all three participants in this study seem to have difficulty understanding why African Americans still face so many challenges in the workplace. Allen (2005) contends that those who are considered honorary Whites are fearful of groups located at the bottom of the racial hierarchy and chastise them for not living up to a White measuring stick (p 60).The participants did not seem to understand that these challenges are the results of oppressive attitudes and racially discriminatory practices, which often make African Americans still feel leapfrogged by immigrants. As an example of this persistent racial discrimination against African Americans in the workplace in United States, Waldinger (2000) asserts that it is far more difficult for African Americans to acquire the skills needed to enter higher levels of the blue-collar hierarchy than it is for immigrants. At the lower levels of the white-collar hierarchy, African Americans seem more victimized by discrimination than immigrants, and they often encounter substantial competition from Whites.

Ford (1994) also gives an example of such discriminatory practices, pointing out that while looking for employees, some Los Angeles companies make use of code words to conceal their biased employing practices. Ford (1994) adds that in such circumstances, when employers called seeking a new employee, they used the code such as “talk to Maria” to indicate preference for Hispanics. “See me,” another example of code, meant they wanted no people of color. Waldinger (2000) adds that even though the hotel industry in New York has long found a substantial number of its workers among African Americans and continues to do so today, immigrants appear to provide a preferable workforce.

This perspective of African-Americans as lazy and chronically dependent on government assistance is explored by Allen (2005) by explaining that "throughout modern history, Whites have projected all sorts of unfounded negative attributes onto people of color and all sorts of positive attributes onto Whites, as a way of diverting attention from White culpability and White terrorism" (p. 59). Waldinger (2000) is particularly troubled by the fact that, to some degree, employers' arguments made it clear that, in their view, immigrants who have not been spoiled by the welfare system tend to become much harder workers.

Maria in particular appears to be oblivious to such practices, and she falls short of understanding the source of African American indignation and apprehension of bigotry in the workplace. Allen (2005) suggests that inter-ethnic racism is another divide and conquer strategy used to discriminate against Blacks. Inter-ethnic racism according to Allen (2005) works to construct barriers between Non-White racial groups, pitting Asians against Blacks, Chicanos against Native Americans. This type of attitude is largely responsible for shaping the nature of racism and prejudice against African Americans.

Unaware of these dynamics, Maria talked of her apprehension about the fact that some African Americans feel threatened by Hispanics in the workplace. Maria also fails to understand the predicament of low-skilled Black workers, who sometimes compete with immigrants for low skilled, low paid jobs. As such the challenges faced by African Americans are very different from Hispanic immigrants. When Maria talked about her experience with African Americans she tried to sound tolerant, she hesitated, but ended up conveying how frustrated she feels about relating to other races in the workplace.

María: Pero algunos morenos dicen que nosotros los espanos, les estamos quitando el trabajo. Yo no se, no los quiero discriminar, a uno. Pero ya vez que, cuando entra una persona nueva, nosotros los espanos tratamos de ayudarles, a ensenarles como hacer las cosas, mientras los morenos no les gusta ensenar nada.

But you see some Blacks say that we, the Hispanics, are taking away their jobs. Usually when they hire someone new, we, the Hispanics try to help the new person, try to teach them the job, but the Blacks do not want to help even some new Black employees coming in. I don't know, I don't want to discriminate against anyone.

Sonia also fails to understand the source of African-American resentment and the privileges bestowed upon Whites by the color of their skin. Although she understands that as a Multiracial woman she is situated on the borderlands of racial hierarchies, she does not seem capable of making the connection between the social injustices committed against African Americans and the reason why they seem so skeptical of other races. This strategy, according to Freire (1993), works to blame the victims for their own victimization "One of the characteristics of the oppressor consciousness and its necrophilic view of the world is thus sadism. Humanity is a "thing" and the Whites possess it as an exclusive right, as inherited property. To the oppressor consciousness, the humanization of the "others" of the people, appears not as the pursuit of full humanity, but as subversion" (p.41).

Sonia seems oblivious to the social phenomenon that depicts involuntary and volunteer minorities. In Literacy with an Attitude Finn (1999) categorizes minority groups based on their mode of entry to the United States. Finn's categorizations are based on the work of Ogbu (1992)

who characterizes immigrant minorities as people who have come to the United States on their own terms, seeking to improve their lives economically, politically and socially.

Involuntary minorities, however, are depicted as those people who were brought to the United States against their own will through slavery, conquest, or colonization. Finn (1999) notes that this reality consequently causes them to be relegated to an inferior position and deprived of assimilation. Kivel (1995), however, reminds us that most Americans either are immigrants or can trace their ancestry to immigrants. Kivel (1995) agrees with Finn and Ogbu in confirming that there are two groups of people in the American population that are considered involuntary minorities– American Indians and African Americans. These distinctive histories have considerable influence on the current and projected ethnic and racial makeup of the United States population. "The historical experiences of these two groups are unique and must be taken into account when assessing the reason that they remain the two most underprivileged racial groups in the country" (Kivel 1995, p. 4). Allen (2005) affirms that an added layer to this phenomenon is the fact that frequently Non-African-American people of color tend to join forces with Whites through blatant racism and colorblind dogmas to rule out Native Americans and African-Americans' possibilities of attaining higher status.

Moreover, Finn (1999) asserts that in fact for involuntary minorities, the dominant group is not only different, it is the enemy; this cultural difference in turn becomes a cultural boundary. Once a cultural identification is established in opposition to another, a border is established that people cross at their own risk. And those who have the courage to cross the cultural boundaries are likely to be seen as traitors; they are not likely to be fully accepted by the dominant group. In

fact, involuntary minorities do not believe that they would be accepted even if they surrender their identity, a belief for which they have sufficient reasons (Finn, 1999).

The participants of this study and I were not coerced to migrate to the United States, thus, we fall within the voluntary minority category. All four of us came to the United States with a sense of achieving and striving to better our lives. We had goals, and we had the motivation to achieve our goals. But all four of us had difficulty in the beginning understanding race relations in the United States. The fact that we were not aware of the systematic nature of racism in this country made some of us experience resentment and confusion. This confusion became more evident as we learned about the way racism shapes and influences everyday life of individuals of color in the United States.

You are at home, a stranger, the border disputes have been

settled, the volley of shots have shattered the truce,

you are wounded, lost in action dead, fighting back;

To live in the borderlands means the mill

with the razor white teeth wants

shred off your olive-red skin, to

crush out the kernel,

your heart pound,

you pinch you

roll you out

smelling like white bread but dead.

To survive in the borderlands

you must live sin fronteiras,

be a crossroads

(Anzaldua, 402)

Racism in the Form of Invisibility

Without doubt, racism was one of the most poignant themes that emerged from this study, and the topic of racism in the form of invisibility was manifested in most interviews that I conducted for this study. In analyzing the narratives, I found that racism in the form of invisibility was detected by all three participants. The participants were forced to grapple with the perceived invisibility of multiracial individuals in the context of the United States culture. They seemed aggravated and disappointed when they encountered situations in which they had to reject racial labels given by individuals that were locked into the bipolar Black/White struggles.

Although these three women wanted to make it clear that they were neither Black, nor White, they equally wished to send a message that they should not be perceived as invisible, and that the racial challenges that they faced warranted recognition. For example, Sonia talked about

people changing the way they perceived her because they had found out that she was not one of them. Furthermore, Maria expressed concern about the way African Americans felt threatened by her in the workplace, causing their relationship to be strained. Yet, Jane expressed frustration with the labels people give her, and the lack of trust she has to endure from Whites and Blacks equally.

Discontent was at all times evident when Sonia talked about the racial labels that people give her. Sonia says that while meeting people in Americus, she is initially treated differently [nicer] because people think that she is from Eastern Europe or that she is White-American. However once people hear her voice and see that she is Latina, she notices a hint of disappointment in people's (Whites) faces. Sonia seems to have some measure of understanding the dimension of racism for African-Americans and she understands that racism affects how other people treat her as well. For example, Black-Americans seem more comfortable and at ease when they realize that she is not a White-American woman, whereas White-Americans seem less comfortable and less at home when they realize that she is not White-American.

> Sonia: Well, most people are surprised to hear that I am Latina, because I do not look like your typical Latina. Most people think that I am from Eastern Europe, or Russia. But, it is interesting to see how Blacks seem to feel more at ease and relaxed when they learn that I am not White. To me it is as if they feel like I do not offer much threat to them, I am not sure why. On the other hand, the Whites seem to react the opposite of the Blacks, because once they hear my accent, I think that they realize that I am not one of them, and it causes them to become more reserved and less trusting.

Again, unintentional racism and colorblindness disguised as the naïve principle that all races are equal, is at play as Jane also expresses displeasure with the fact that her race is somewhat invisible. She seems frustrated with the persistent struggles between Blacks and Whites, and the racial invisibility of other races as a result of this bipolar struggle. Perhaps Jane's naïve view of race is due in part to the fact that, as Lee and Bean (2007) argue, the experience of multiracialism among Asians and Latinos is closer to White than Black experience.

> Jane: I try not to let the race issue affect my decisions. I don't dwell too much on who I am, but at times at work people think that I am White; while others think that I am Black. People don't think of me as being Indian. The fact is that they don't see me as anything else other than Black or White; it is as if my race was invisible.

Maria adopted a more simplistic view of race relations in the United States. She demonstrated that she has tried to understand the way people try to separate and segregate themselves based on race. Nonetheless, she does not seem to understand the historical factors behind the acrimony between the Blacks and the Whites. She is inadvertently unaware of the depth of oppression endured by Blacks and the fact that their resentment is the direct result of a history of an unspoken code of silence imposed by a society that, more often than not, relegates African Americans to second-class status in the United States.

> *María: Pues lo que yo he visto es que, mira que yo tengo familia España, y nosotros hacemos las cosas diferentes, el en cambio el la hace diferente también. Pero miro que las personas aquí viven en sus grupos de racas, o sea, no se mesclan mucho. Pois esto es distinto de lo que he mirado en mi país. Yo, o sea, estuve muy sorprendida con la manera*

como la gente de diferentes racas no se lleva. Yo he tratado de aprender cómo la gente se lleva.

See I have Hispanic family here, and we do things differently. People here in the United States do things differently, they don't mix with other races, and even the same English they speak is different. But we are all equal, no discrimination. I mean, I was always surprised to see how people from different races don't get along. I try to learn about the way people get along.

Maria's comments suggest that, this race-neutral approach might work to allow her to cross cultural boundaries normally erected between racial groups. Although Maria was raised in a context that was devoid of racial identity concerns, she still wants to learn about race relations in her community and mixed-race family. In fact Maria wants to form alliances with other racial groups – particularly her husband's extended family – in order to impart a sense of racial identity on her son.

Race as a Confounding Issue

Resentment as result of racial perception also surfaced as a significant sub-theme for this study. All three participants reported some degree of resentment as a result of how they were perceived by either Blacks or Whites. There were accounts of disenchantment with the Whites' distrust and sense of superiority. There were accounts of dissatisfaction with Blacks' lack of trust and interest in making connections with the participants as well. In the end, these difficulties left these three women with a sense of not belonging to the Sumter County community. These difficulties also made invisibility take on a new dimension, due to their difficulty in blending in

and being accepted. Given the chance, these three women would choose to have meaningful relationships with people from different races; they yearn to accept and be accepted, and they desire to form alliances that could help them navigate the new culture and provide their children with a sense of racial identity.

For example, Sonia seems to resent some of the White Americans' distrust and sense of superiority. At times she feels out of place with White Americans and Black Americans as well. Sonia experiences some difficulties bonding to the larger community in Americus and as a result, invisibility takes on a new level, due to her difficulty to blend in or be accepted. As Sonia spoke about her experience relating to White people in Sumter County, she noted that Whites in this area seem to perceive themselves inherently superior to all other racial groups.

> Sonia: I really sense that Whites want to ask me what I am doing here, why I came to United States. I am so used to it now, that I do not care about it anymore. However, when I mention that my children go to public school, then, the Whites seem to pull back and start showing a lack of interest in me and my children.

Goodman (2001) explains that individuals belonging to a dominant group and the beneficiary of invisible privileges often leads to a sense of superiority, entitlement, and internalized supremacy. The paradox in this assumption lies in the fact that Sonia seems to not remember that she also enjoyed silent White privilege while growing up in her country of origin. Sonia also forgets that even if she opted for a color-blind approach – in denying that racism is a factor in her country of origin – given the fact that she was part of the dominant European group, she lived in similar circumstances of inherent White privilege in Paraguay. Goodman (2001)

holds that the mix of identities does shape our experiences, because privilege can help alleviate experiences of oppression. The more dominant identity one has, the more one can draw on privileges to deal with inequity and oppression. And this is exactly what has happened to Sonia since she often passes for White American in the United States, and thus benefits from White privilege.

Contesting Static Racial Construct

The three participants in the study indicated that they would like to live in a more diverse context, in which race is not viewed as a static construct. To some extent, they seem to believe that a more diverse environment would diminish racial inequalities, curb racist practices and encourage acceptance, and make life easier for themselves and their children.

A similar sentiment is echoed by Jane as she seems discouraged by the lack of diversity in the Sumter County area. Jane indicated that she would like to live in a more diverse community, for the sake of her children and for her own sake. Time and again, the issue of tolerance came forward in this interview. Jane maintained that she would like her children to learn and practice tolerance.

> Sonia: I wish this area was a bit more diverse, not only for me, but for my children as well, because I want them to know that there is so much more out there. I want them to learn to be tolerant.

Sonia for her part inadvertently relied on some stereotypes of Blacks to make her point. She goes on to explain that she has made some friendships with people of other races, but does

not understand the Black Americans' resistance to make friends with her. Sonia seems to understand and to some degree accept the racism coming from White Americans, but she has been surprised and disillusioned with Black Americans because her friendship with them has not resulted in meaningful friendships. Sonia seems to believe that a move to a more diverse area would increase the prospect of better race relations.

> Sonia: I see that Blacks in this area do not want to be related to Non-Blacks, regardless of the color of their skin, or cultural background. So, the difficulty to find friends in this area for my children has been overwhelming at times, and that is one of the reasons why I would like to move to an area that has less racial conflicts.

Sonia also expands on her interactions with people of different races other than her own in her children's school and her community here in Sumter County. She demonstrated genuine interest and yearning for learning about cultures other than her own. Nonetheless, the language of racism was a notable challenge for Sonia to overcome.

> Sonia: I like to know more about other races, I want to make friends with everyone, you know. Most of my friends are Latin-American, but I also have friends from all kind of races. I have some friends that are White, but it makes me sad that I have not been able to make good friends in the African American community. But most Black people that I know are not willing to make friends with me or my family.

The social marginalization that affects both Non-white immigrants and Blacks could be a factor fueling the distrust between African-Americans and Hispanics in the United States. The misperception and suspicion that these two groups harbor about each other might be the reason

why Sonia has had difficulties building meaningful friendship with Blacks. During our conversation, Sonia often expressed the desire for African Americans to be friendlier towards her, and she believes that if blacks would change the way they do things, they would probably be more accepted by other races. But Finn (1999) points out that, in reality, involuntary minority groups do not believe they would ever be fully accepted by other racial groups even if they would adopt mainstream culture. Finn (1999) contends that there's plenty of evidence that this perception is fully warranted.

Breaking the Racial Conventions and Rethinking the Color Line

Contesting static racial construct and longing for a society in which race relations is more inclusive, was indicated by all three participants, with which I concur. Nonetheless, the participants were unaware of their biased approach to racial identity. For example, even though two participants were involved with African American partners, breaking the racial conventions and rethinking the color line was not as easy for these participants as I expected. For one of the participants, the tolerance and positive view of Blacks was limited to her husband's extended family, while she still viewed Whites at the top of racial hierarchy in the United States. Another one felt antagonized and, to a certain extent, threatened by African Americans, while the third participant made an effort to disassociate her children from African Americans. In the end, although they did not want to be perceived negatively by others, they were somewhat unaware of their own biased attitude. Thus, the concern about not sounding racist was a common thread among the three participants during the interviews.

On one hand these three women wanted to express their views and frustrations, but on the other hand they did not seem to be able to express their discontent in a way that did not sound racist. For instance, while admitting that her judgment could be stereotypical, Maria still shows signs of apprehension when she talks about the fact that some African Americans feel threatened by immigrant Hispanics. She clearly did not want to sound intolerant. She hesitated, but ended up demonstrating how resentful and frustrated she feels about relating to Blacks and Whites as well.

Anderson and Jack (1991) call these circumstances meta-statements. Under such circumstances the narrator reassesses her statement in order to avoid being perceived as biased. Anderson and Jack (1991) explain that meta-statements work to inform the interviewer about what categories the individual is using to check her own views, and consent to observation of how the person socializes feelings or thoughts according to certain standards.

Sonia expressed similar but more complex ways of conveying her disappointment with the fact that African Americans do not fully embrace her. She sensed that perhaps she has not properly articulated her frustration with race polarization in the United States, and might have come across as biased. So, she earnestly shared with me the fact that her husband's White family has a history of anti-racist behavior, for they were part of the famous Underground Railroad that aided thousands of slaves in their journey north.

> Sonia: So, my husband's family has a history of trying to establish good relationship with people of another race, and it makes me happy, you know that my children can talk about race in a positive light.

Sonia's comments here speak to the degree that the lack of understanding about racial relations in the United States can affect one's perception of racial prejudice.

Exploring Racial Interactions

Maria's comments here suggest that even if she has had difficulties understanding racial conventions in the United States, she claims that she has had reasonably good relationships with Blacks, Whites and Hispanics in her church and work. But she feels that the Whites who generally work as supervisors and office clerks are one step higher than she is. Maria believes that it is easier to relate to Blacks and Hispanics because they are on a level equivalent to hers. Nonetheless, she did not demonstrate an understanding that this type of thinking contributes to reinforcing racial hierarchy and White vested interest in its own privilege. On the one hand, she shows disenchantment with Blacks and Whites' disregard for her racial identity, but on the other hand she puts herself in a position of inferiority in relation to Whites. A basic way to understand Maria's mind-set is found in Barndt's (2007) assertion that all people are born with a natural vulnerability to both messages of inferiority and superiority. Barndt (2007) adds that the system of racism directs its messages of superiority to White people and its messages of inferiority to people of color.

> *María: Los hueros trabajan así en la oficina, y de supervisores. Mientras nosotros y los morenos trabajamos en la producción. Yo me relaciono mejor con los morenos and espanos porque estamos en el mismo nivel.*
>
> The Whites work as supervisors while the Hispanics and Blacks work as laborers. So, I relate better to the Blacks and Hispanics because they are on same level that I am.

In trying to make sense of what she had said about African Americans, Maria had a certain urge to affirm that she is very happy to be married to her African-American husband. She also extended this acceptance to his family as she mentioned how at times she feels more accepted by her husband's family than by her extended Hispanic family. She maintains that she has no concern for the racial differences between her and her husband. She emphasizes the way he treats her, by repeating several times that her husband is very good to her, as if she was trying to justify her marriage to a Black man.

María: En realidad lo que mi familia hispana no hizo para ayudarme, la de mi esposo lo hizo (que son todos morenos) me hizo. Pero nunca he tenido ninguna preocupación con la diferencia racial entre yo y mi esposo. El es muy bueno comigo.

His family is also very nice to me. Sometimes they are nicer than my own Hispanic family. I met my husband at work. I have not had any concern for our racial differences.

However, Maria seems to need her Hispanic family's validation of choice of husband. She explained that she counts on her Hispanic family members' support of her interracial marriage with an Africa-American man. Nevertheless, shortly after mentioning that she thinks her Hispanic family members are not judging her for her choice of partner, she also mentions that she is not too confident that her Hispanic community and family approve of her marriage with a Non-Hispanic man. While interviewing Maria, I could see in her body language that in fact she does have some measure of concern, and that she is not certain about their level of racial tolerance.

María: En mi familia, en mi comunidad la única preocupación es que siempre quieren saber cómo me comunico con mi esposo, si el habla español, yo hablo ingles. Bueno, esto

es lo que pienso, porque quien sabe lo dicen detrás de mi. No sé si quizás me discriminan por estar casada con un hombre que no es hispano.

In my Hispanic community the only concern that they have is if I can speak English, if my husband can speak Spanish, how we are able to communicate. Well, that's what I think, because who knows what they might say behind my back. I am not sure if they discriminate against me or not because I am married to a man that is not Hispanic, I don't know.

Tizard and Phoenix (2002) hold that belonging to a culture encompasses not only sharing a language, religion, music, arts and customs, but also sharing values and a feeling that one is part of a shared history and identifies with the culture. This argument is demonstrated here as Maria's accounts illustrate how the cultural differences take a toll on their relationship. She explains that at times her husband makes some attempts to blend in with her family, by trying to attend family celebrations, but at other times he is not willing to do so. But the cultural differences still bother Maria.

María: A veces la diferencia se me hace difícil. Pero a veces si es fiesta familiar ahí si el va y dice "yo me voy con usted por un ratito porque es una fiesta de su familia. Entonces mi esposo siempre está conmigo en navidad a la noche, pero en la mañana vamos a la casa de la mama de él, y ahí celebramos con toda su familia en Plains.

Maria: Sometimes these differences are difficult for me. But sometimes if it is a family party, then yes, he goes and says, "I am going with you for a little while because it is your

family party." Another difference is that we celebrate Christmas on the twenty-fourth in the evening, and my husband's family celebrates on the twenty- fifth in the morning.

Maria mentioned numerous times during the interview that she tries to get together with her husband's family as often as possible, and when she does so, she feels accepted by her husband's family. This struggle to please both sides of the family is not easy, according to Dalmage (2000), because networking and trying to be comfortable with both sides of the multiracial family at times seems to indicate confusion, weak self-esteem, and a lack of firm politics. In what follows Maria talks about her efforts to maintain good relationship with her husband's African-American family and the effort they make to embrace her as well.

María: La familia de el nunca me ha hecho un desprecio o discriminado a mí, así por ser hispana. A veces cuando nosotros vivíamos en Plains, su familia venia a visitarme miraban haciendo comida, y siempre decían, "hay huele rico," yo les preguntaba, "quieren?" Yo cuando voy a la casa de ellos, siempre me invitan a comer la comida que hacen.

Maria: His family has never undermined me or discriminated against me because I am Hispanic. Sometimes when I lived in Plains, his family would come to visit and would see me cooking Mexican food and they would say, wow, it smells good, then I'd ask, would you like some? My husband taught me to cook the food that they eat, so I cook it at my house. His family always invited me to eat at their house.

Not only did Maria seek her Hispanic family's approval of her interracial marriage, she also had the need to be validated by her African-American husband's family. Dalmage (2000)

explains that multiracial family members frequently find themselves having to travel in and out of various racial identities, but this movement is not easily accepted in a society erected on a racial hierarchy with distinct color lines.

Situated Racial Awareness and the Construction of Difference

In this section I explored the participants' perspective on raising multiracial, rather than monoracial, children. While asked about what it means to have multiracial children, Sonia stated that she embraces the multiracial identity of the children, and is very proud of it. She makes a point of emphasizing the advantages of being multiracial. The impact of raising multiracial children aware of their full heritage can be beneficial because children who are raised in two cultures, research suggests, can also be expected to have higher levels of self-esteem, have greater tolerance for others, and achieve at a higher level (Nakazawa, 2003). It is this aspect of greater tolerance for others and broader view of racial identity that makes Sonia deduces that she should accentuate the multiraciality of her children. But in trying to sound tolerant herself, Sonia denies the notion that her children are inherently superior because they are multiracial.

> Sonia: I am so proud and happy to have multiracial children. They have a more open mind, a broader perspective of racial issues. It is like their vision of race and culture is more elastic, it stretches beyond one single race, because they understand many cultures.

As Sonia talked about the way her experience in an interracial family differs from that of monoracial families, she emphasized the ability of multiracial families to thrive in two different cultures. Nakazawa (2003) notes that multiracial children whose parents help them reach "bicultural competence" tend to have greater creativity and flexibility of thought. This is possible

in part because they are able to use their knowledge of more than one cultural approach to life's challenges when they face difficult circumstances. In what follows Sonia voices her perception of the differences between multiracial families and monoracial families.

> Sonia: Of course my experience of living in a multiracial family is different from monoracial families. It is different because my family is not isolated in one race or one culture, and stuff. Being in a multiracial family gives me and my children the opportunity to jump from one culture to another very easily.

As a result of this study, Sonia seemed to have developed some awareness of issues of race and racism that she had not had before. During the second interview Sonia told me that she has always identified her children as Hispanic. Her choice is a result of her racial heritage pride and the fact that her children spend more time with her than with her husband. But after the first interview, she started to reflect on the racial identity of her children. She also took in consideration the fact that they are mixed-race and that, as such, they should embrace all aspects of their racial heritage. Sonia indicated that she would like for her family to learn more about, multiculturalism, tolerance, and awareness of differences.

> Sonia: So, sometimes, I think that maybe I should mark them as multiracial rather than just Latin-American, because they are mixed, they are a mix of two great cultures. It is interesting, because we are here discussing this, you know, I have not thought much about labeling them as multiracial. And, so, our goal is that, you know, they learn from both cultures so they can become more accepting of everybody.

The fact that there is an unspoken racial hierarchy in the Sumter county society is indisputable. But no other institution in this town reflects this hierarchy more intensely than the schools. The Black/White fault line that separates this society is so evident that if one has a light skin, but dares to enroll one's children in public school, the privileged Whites start to wonder what is wrong. And it is this aspect of the struggle between Blacks and Whites that so discouraged my study's participants. Sonia's frustration with the Whites' assumption that there is something wrong with her children, and the bipolar Black-White discussion, once again came up in the interview. She would like to support the public schools, but she also would like to attain prestige and status in Sumter County. Sonia knows all too well that having her children in public school does not provide her with the opportunity to climb up the racial and social hierarchy. In Sonia's perception, those who choose to enroll their children in an All-White private school move up on the social and racial hierarchy, while those attending integrated public schools are propelled downward. In the following scenario Sonia voices her frustration and concerns.

> Sonia: So, my children are a combination of races, where am I going to put them? And worst, they are always discussing only the problems of Blacks, and Whites. They don't think about discussing any other race, they think that theirs is only Blacks and Whites.

Racial awareness as a result of the exposure to the multiracial discussion was evident in at least two interviews. When asked if she has changed her perception about race and racial issues since coming to the United States, Sonia promptly answered that her perception of race has changed tremendously since moving to the United States.

> Sonia: Yes, my experience and perception of race have changed a lot.

Mixed-race people remain figments

of and reflections of our imaginations,

whether one worships or bemoans their presence.

Hidden in all the rhetoric are code words,

assumptions, and agendas

clearly stated but often

explicit nonetheless

Michael Thornton (1996)

Becoming Aware of Multiraciality

Whether one agrees or not with the argument above, the reality is that as mixed-race individuals we have to contend with our perceived differences in the United States culture. And in so doing, we often have to deal with the fact that for many monoracial individuals we might not belong. It is with this sentiment that all three participants talked about the differences between their multiracial family and monoracial families.

Not all three participants felt that the differences were significant enough to warrant a discussion. For example Jane was visibly uncomfortable talking about the difference between her multiracial family and other monoracial families. Nonetheless, it is difficult to understand why Jane views race as a non-issue. I venture to say that what she does not want to contend with, is

the fact that although her family presents multiracial characteristics, for the most part they have adopted exclusively monoracial practices. However, Jane admits that perhaps if her sons' father was present, they would have embraced more of the Black culture. In addition, Jane demonstrated that, given the fact that they live with her Asian-Indian parents, it was easier to opt for an Asian-Indian racial label for her children than to declare a Multiracial identity. Min (2006) argues that although becoming White may not be a realistic option, assimilating into the Non-Black ranks has been suggested as a possible alternative for Asian-Americans. Thus, one other interesting aspect of Jane's family understanding of race relations is that, although her children attend Sumter County public schools (a largely Black school district), their network of friends is predominantly White.

> Jane: My situation is a bit unique because my husband and I have not been together since my boys were babies. We live with my parents, in an Asian-Indian cultural context. But of course my children have also adopted United States' customs and culture. But, really we are Asian-Indians and we lived as Asian-Indians.

Contrary to Jane, Maria is somewhat aware of the differences between monoracial and multiracial families. She seems to see a significant difference between her multiracial family and other monoracial families. For example, she thinks that her multiracial family is privileged because they have the knowledge, the skills, and the motivation to navigate two distinct cultures. But she also understands the challenges faced by a multiracial family.

> *María: A nosotros los espanos tenemos costumbres diferentes como parejas que otras familias de una sola raza. Un ejemplo, mi esposo no le gusta ir a los bailes mexicanos,*

no le gusta bailar como nosotros los mexicanos. Y pues, es así la diferencia, o sea son dos culturas distintas en una misma casa, en una misma familia. Y a veces se nos hace difícil para juntar las dos culturas.

Maria: You know, sometimes I see differences between my multiracial family and other non-multiracial families, because the Hispanics have different traditions than couples of one single race. For example, my husband does not like to dance or go to the Mexican dances; he doesn't like to dance like the Mexicans. You see, this makes the difference, in other words, there are two cultures in one house, in one single family. It sometimes makes it difficult to blend the two cultures.

For the participants and me, moving to the United States forced us to embark on a paradigm shift, one that impelled us to adopt different racial interpretations. For Maria, the pivotal moment in this paradigm shift came as she became the mother of a multiracial son. Maria's multiracial son is often read as Hispanic at school and other places in the community. While he could be considered an African American child, he is often granted Hispanic racial identity by association with his sister and mother. Maria spoke of his racial characteristics and abilities as something to be proud of. She demonstrated that her son is very special because he is multiracial and knows how to navigate two distinct cultures.

María: Significa un orgullo muy grande de mi hijo, yo miro que el es diferente, es muy bonito, muy inteligente, y es capaz de hablar dos lenguajes, es capaz de llevar las dos culturas, y esto lo miro muy bonito, muy especial, estoy muy orgullosa de mi hijo y hija.

Maria: It means a lot to me. I am very proud of my son, he is different, he is beautiful, he

is very smart, he speaks two languages, he knows two different cultures, and it makes him very special.

When asked about what it means to have multiracial children, Sonia demonstrated that she fully embraces the multiracial identity of her children, and is very proud of it. Sonia derives great pride from her children's Multiracial identity, and she makes a point in conveying this sentiment to her children. To highlight the advantages of being multiracial she mentions the fact that her children are able to navigate two different cultures, to speak two languages and to have a more critical view of the world. But Sonia denies the notion that her children are inherently superior because they are multiracial.

Greene (1995) explains that we have a better prospect of construing what we are, if we evoke some awareness of our own background. As these three participants combed their past experiences in the interviews, they also had a chance to figure out who they are. When conducting this study, I was somewhat uncomfortable to ask the participants to disclose private details of their lives. So, when a participant mentioned that she started to consider Multiracial identity for her children as result of this study, I was not only relieved but happy that this study has fostered this type of awareness. Sonia explained that she started to consider Multiracial identity for her children as result of this study. She talks about learning more about, multiculturalism, tolerance, and awareness of race and gender differences as we discussed it during the interviews.

CHAPTER 6

THE IMPACT OF SEXISM IN LIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Sexism as it Relates to the Oppression of Women of Color

Critical race feminism, the philosophical framework for this study, centers on the myriad factors affecting the subjugation of women of color (Wing 1999). Hua (2003) asserts that critical race feminism endorses the study of the racialization of womanhood, and explores womanhood, as it looks at how women of color are "othered" and oppressed by various brutal histories such as slavery, colonization, genocide, lynching, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and globalized labor. Through this study I gained an enhanced understanding of identity issues for women of color, and an even more enhanced understanding of how identity concern is unquestionably an important factor in the life of immigrant women of color.

Chin, (1994), like Wing (1999), confirms that "ethnic and gender identity is intricately related to self-identity for women of color" (p. 202). A significant measure of evidence in this study indicates that although sexism was an important phenomenon in the lives of the participants, to some extent they appear to be unaware or unable to articulate its impact in their lives. The stories told by these three women do not support the argument that they had a clear understanding of sexism as it relates to the oppression of women of color.

Sexism in the Form of Patriarchy

Jane identified the presence of sexism in her family's cultural background in the form of arranged matrimony. Her parents expected her to enter a pre-arranged marriage with a striving, prosperous Asian-Indian man. Instead Jane opted to marry a man that she selected, someone from a different racial and cultural background. She married a Jamaican-American man who had a different upbringing from her. Was this an act of defiance and resistance to an oppressive patriarchal practice? Did this choice, drive her into an even more oppressive patriarchal situation? Jane chose not to elaborate on this possibility, but she also would not vehemently deny it.

However, the marriage with someone different from her parents' preference did not last, and Jane seems to think that her husband's different rearing was to blame for the collapse of the marriage. As she tried to explain these differences, she gave the impression that perhaps the fact that her husband's failure to understand the role of the man as the provider and head of the family, might have contributed to the extraneous relationship and ensuing marriage collapse. These do not appear to be the sentiments of an ostensibly strong and independent woman who feels violated, oppressed, demeaned and abused. Although sexism seemed to be the main reason she ended her marriage, at that point in the interview, Jane did not articulate that sexism was a factor in the doomed relationship.

> Jane: My perspective, or the way I was raised, the man is the dominant figure, the bread winner, whereas my ex-husbands' experience was a little bit different. For starters, his parents were not together for too long. His mother was a single mother, so he also grew

up without the presence of a father. So, he was very insecure. He was very smart, and was successful in everything that he did, but for some reason he felt threatened by my sense of confidence and also he felt threatened by comments that other people made about me. I don't know, it was strange, it was difficult.

However, despite the fact that Jane does not deliberately articulate her opposition to sexism, the evidence from her accounts points to ways that she fought it. She complained that besides having to endure the verbal, psychological and physical abuse, she had to contend with sexist comments from her husband's friends as well.

Jane: One thing that disturbed me about the comments made by some people back then, his friends, you know, was that they always complimented me based on my physical appearance. So, I always wanted to ask them: "why don't you ask about my intelligence, I've got a brain, you know?" I want to be complimented by my capabilities, you know. It really bothered me. Umm! But I was so attracted to my ex-husband, he was so good looking, so charming, so successful, and all of that drew me to him.

Jane's life has been punctuated by sexism. From her choice of partners to what is expected from her in terms of gender role, Jane's family frequently relied on practices that emphasize patriarchal privilege. In what follows I have attempted to illustrate some of the ways in which Jane articulated the presence of sexism in her family's cultural background in the form of pre-arranged marriage.

Jane: As I grew older and faced dating and socializing issues, things became a little more difficult, first because in my Asian-Indian culture, girls are not supposed to date, we are

meant to marry a husband of our parents' choices. But, I was allowed to go to the prom with a guy who was an Asian-Indian friend of the family.

Jane did not show interest in debating the consequences of sexism in the life of women of color. However, during the interview I could detect some degree of resentment in her account as she spoke about her husband's perception of her as property, and his effort to maintain control and dominance of her and their sons. In the end, his coercive behavior had a profound impact on Jane's sense of self-esteem. Jane talked about assuring that she would never subject herself to the emotional, verbal and physical abuse she had to endure in her marriage. In the following scenario Jane talks about feeling resentment about the emotional, verbal and physical abuse she had to endure in her marriage.

Jane: My husband and I met through a common friend. We were initially just friends, for about three years. At the beginning of the relationship everything was good and romantic, and then the more we got to know each other, the more we could see that maybe it was not meant to work, we were together for roughly seven years.

He was very jealous and possessive, if anyone looked at me, he would be asking "why are they looking at you?" My ex-husband was very possessive and controlling. He wanted to control everything that I did. And that caused us to get in arguments, and he would verbally abuse me, and it escalated to physical abuse, and it became really bad for me and the baby. To be honest with you, if it wasn't for my baby boy, I would probably be dead, because there were instances in which he avoided hitting me just because I had the baby on my arms. So, after that, I decided to leave him and move in with my mother.

> I wanted to live to raise my son. But you know, I felt guilt for not giving my son a chance to grow up with a father, so I returned to my husband even knowing that he probably would abuse me again. And in fact it didn't take long before he was verbally and physically abusing me again. And once again I was pregnant, so that time I decided to leave him for good.

Hurt and lonely, Jane initially hesitated to seek help from her family, because after all she had disappointed family members by not marrying someone they approved, through a pre-arranged marriage. Instead she married exactly into the type of race her family wanted to avoid. She felt humiliated and confused. And as many victims of domestic abuse feel, Jane blamed herself for the unsustainable situation, rather than perceiving it as violence against women. In the end although embarrassed and emotionally wounded, Jane had no other alternative but to return to her parents' house.

> Jane: I was living the lowest point of my life, my self-esteem was so low. At that point I did not have much contact with my family because they were disappointed that I didn't marry an Asian-Indian man in a pre-arranged marriage style. My parents wanted me to marry a lawyer or doctor, and it was fine with me, but I also wanted to have a say on such important aspect of my life, you know. So, I swallowed my pride and returned to my parents' house here in Americus.

Like Jane, Maria did not care to elaborate on issues related to sexism. Yet, her accounts provided evidence to suggest that she resisted being discriminated on the basis of gender stereotype. While Maria is still quite pleased that her husband has chosen to embrace some

aspects of her customs, she seems a bit disenchanted that he refuses to give in to some other aspects of her culture. For example, the "bailes" (Popular Latin-American social gatherings that include dancing) are very important social events in the lives of most Mexicans. So when he declines to go to the Mexican dances, and does not eat everything she cooks, she feels disillusioned and questions his acceptance and loyalty to her culture.

But Maria indicated in the interviews that she is relieved that her husband consents to her going to the Mexican bailes without him. Could her husband's attitude amount to sexism? The fact that she needs permission from her husband to go to the bailes in her view does not constitute sexism, only due respect to her husband. However, he does not need permission from Maria to go to his motorcycle riders' gatherings.

> *María: A veces pienso en mis sobrinas y yo, pues ellos en parejas van a las fiestas, a los bailes y voy a las fiestas pero solo con mi hija y mi hijo, porque a mi esposo no le gusta ir a los bailes. Mi esposo no me prohíbe nada, me déjà ir a los bailes, y pues me dice que me porte bien y ve adonde quiera, o sea no mi dice "Oh non vayas a esto o aquello."*
>
> Sometimes I think about my nieces and I, well, they go to the Mexican parties as couples, but I go only with my son and my daughter because my husband doesn't like to go to parties. My husband doesn't prevent me from going to the "bailes", he says, you can go, and behave yourself wherever you go, I mean, he doesn't say, "oh don't go or this or that."
>
> *La diferencia entre yo y mis sobrinas es que los esposos de ellas son un poco celosos y controlan sus esposas, y ya ves que mi esposo no es celoso. El no más me dice "date tu*

lugar y se va a bailar, baila apenas con tu familia." A mí no me gusta estar controlado por mi esposo, yo lo respecto, lo quiero, pero también deseo que me lo da el respecto .El dice que la confianza es lo primero.

The difference between me and my nieces is that their husbands are jealous and controlling, and you see my husband is not jealous, he only says, stay in your place, go to the "bailes" dance, but dance with your family members only. I don't like to be controlled by my husband, I respect him, I love him, but I also want him to respect me. He says trust comes first.

An interesting pattern that emerged from the interviews, which is worth mentioning here is that all three participants chose to leave an abusive male at some point of their lives. Maria left her daughter's father due to his neglect, psychological, and verbal abuse, while Sonia left a seemly mentally ill and abusive partner. In addition, Sonia chose not to conform to the norm of what is expected from a woman in her country of origin.

Although, these two women's ill-treatment did not amount to physical abuse, they still consider themselves victims of domestic abuse. Okun (1986) argue that in fact, many battered women portray nonphysical forms of abuse, (psychological, emotional, or verbal abuse) as the most difficult for them to endure. In the end, Maria and Sonia fought this type of exploitation, because they know that non-physical abuse could lead to physical abuse. Tolman (2001) writes that non-physical domestic abuse may be a significant predictor of subsequent physical violence.

Sonia was reluctant to discuss sexist discrimination in her life. However, sexism surfaced as a relatively significant factor that affected her view of herself and her children. For example,

when Sonia talked about her children, she mentioned that she has two children from two different partners. One was born in the United States; the other was born in Paraguay. As she talked about the birth of her oldest child, she was visibly uncomfortable explaining that she endured verbal and psychological abuse by her first partner. That abusive situation took a toll on her self-esteem, and eventually pushed her to seek refuge in another country.

> Sonia: The oldest one was born in Paraguay and the youngest was born in the United States. My oldest child has a Paraguayan biological father, and my youngest has a North American father. My oldest daughter's father had a mental problem, and was psychologically and verbally abusive to me. So, I decided to leave. He still threatens my family in Paraguay in order to pressure me to give him parental rights. My oldest child does not care to meet him, and his pressure makes her to strength her relationship with my present husband.

Although, Sonia and Maria confirmed that they endured some level of domestic abuse, it was Jane who faced the most challenging circumstances, as she suffered physical, verbal and psychological violence at the hands of her husband. Okun (1986) argues that there is a big propensity to consider domestic violence as punishment or as negative reinforcement for undesirable behavior, disregarding violence as a means in itself for gaining dominance. In Jane's view the abuses she endured worked to maintain her husband's dominance over most aspects of her life.

The women in this study spoke of the challenges that they had to face in their first relationships, but two of them spoke in glowing terms about their present marriage. Case in

point, both Maria and Sonia indicated that one positive aspect of the present relationship is the fact that they are respected and accepted by their husbands. Maria takes pride in the fact that she is married to an African American man. This sense of security and pride is due in part to the fact that at times she feels more accepted by her husband and family than by her own extended Hispanic family. Sonia for her part does not mention the race of her husband as a determining factor of the success of her interracial marriage, but she is pleased with her second choice of partner. Jane on the other hand does not care to elaborate on her past marriage. However, she maintains that at times she wished her sons would have the opportunity to have a mother and a father present in their lives.

Contrary to these three women, I did not have to leave an abusive partner. But the fact that I am not (or have never been) in an abusive relationship does not free me from fighting sexism and gender discrimination on a daily basis. Whether it is resisting gender roles that relegate women to second-class status, or voicing my discontent with sexist jokes that are demeaning to women, or educating my husband, my sons and students about covert acts of sexism, I am frequently combating sexism and discrimination against women.

The voices of the participants in this study demonstrated that they all had experiences that could have predisposed them to learning about sexism, but none of them wanted to emphasize it. Perhaps this attitude is there in part due to these women's loyalty to their family. Voicing their concern about injustice and sexism in the family context could be interpreted as a divisive approach and a betrayal to their partner. However, the participants gave a range of responses when asked about gender discrimination in their everyday lives. For example, all three women expressed their discontent with the prospect of being controlled by a partner, or giving into

practices that substantiate patriarchy. Although with some level of reluctance, in discussing the racial identity of their children and previous relationships with the father of their children, all three participants mentioned that they experienced some sort of physical, psychological or verbal abuse. Ultimately the domestic abuse they endured drove them to seek safer relationships and environments.

CHAPTER 7

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PARTICIPANTS' DECISION TO CHOOSE A PARTICULAR RACE INDICATOR FOR THEIR CHILDREN

What factors influence the decision of mothers of multiracial children to choose a particular racial indicator for their children? How does this choice impact the educational experience of their children in the Sumter County School District? In answering this question, all three participants mentioned racial heritage pride as one of the most important factors that prompted them to opt for a particular racial label. Accordingly, all three participants chose to identify their children with the same racial label that they use to describe themselves. Thus, racial heritage pride emerged as one of the dominant sub-themes in this study.

Nonetheless, given the pigmentocracy and currency of race in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2002), the participants understand that skin color has a price. And it shows in the decisions and choices these three women made for their multiracial children. Therefore, because they expected that their multiracial children would face challenges in the community, the participants opted for a label that they viewed as being less prone to intolerance. This view, in turn, led these three women to choose racial labels that could be more socially advantageous to their children and more widely accepted in the community.

The awareness and fear of the consequences of identifying their children with racial groups that are at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, was a significant factor influencing the choice of racial labels for the participants' children. Jane and Maria both had children that could

pass for African American, a reality that makes both of them apprehensive because they are fully aware of the injustices and racist practices perpetrated against African Americans. Because of this common assumption, both women chose to identify their children with a race that would not face as much retaliation and injustice. This concern is hinged on the fact that in the United States, racism works to discriminate against ethnic minorities and to perpetuate White privilege. Hooks (2003), while discussing racial inequalities and injustice endured by people of color, contends that most people in the United States oppose blatant acts of racism. Hooks (2003) adds that in fact, people in the United States allegedly want to see an end to racism and racial discrimination. Nonetheless, Hooks (2003) argues that there is a deep gap between theory and practice.

Hooks' argument resonates well with the participants' views of racial discrimination and its consequences to people of color. For instance, Jane says that she has witnessed biased and abusive behavior of some children at school simply because they were Black. In consequence, although Jane has children that could pass for African American, she prefers to have her two boys labeled as Asian-Indian. And Maria chose to identify her children as Hispanic. In this next statement Jane tries to justify her choice of racial label for her two sons.

> Jane: So, I have seen some African American students being really mistreated, and I did not want that for my boys, so I prefer to label them as Asian-Indian, I don't know, that's my perception. I think that things may be more difficult for my children if they were labeled African American. I know that there is a perception of Asian-Indians that is acceptable in certain groups, and I prefer for my boys to be labeled as Asian-Indian

While this seating is based on Jane and Maria's fear of retaliation against their children – because they look Black – Sonia on the contrary has children that could pass for White. Yet Sonia indicated that racial pride is the most significant factor influencing her choice of racial labels for her children. Sonia reiterated a number of times that she is very proud of her racial heritage. Accordingly, she chose to identify her children with the same racial label that she uses to describe herself.

> Sonia: I chose to label both my children as Latin-Americans, because I think that the Latino culture in both Brazil and Paraguay tends to have children identifying with the mother's cultural background.

Further in the discussion concerning racial indicator of their children, participants focused on additional factors determining a particular racial marker for their children. Another factor influencing Jane's decision to opt for the Asian-Indian racial marker for her children is the fact that she lives with her parents. Since Jane and her sons live with her Asian-Indian parents, it is easier to label her sons Asian-Indian than claiming Multiracial or Black heritage. Jane also pointed to the absence of her husband as partial justification for her choice of racial labels for her children. With some measure of discomfort Jane told me that at times she longs for a normal family (with a father and mother present) for her children. But she reiterated that she is not willing to go back to an abusive relationship.

> Jane: I guess with my situation, I am not with the dad, so, their dad has no communication with the boys whatsoever, I mean, he is not present in the boys' lives at all. So, my boys only know my culture which is Asian-Indian culture. Because you know,

> we live with my parents, so they know my side of the family, they know my Indian culture. Both my boys met their dad when they were little. But they don't remember him now.

In the following scenario, Jane talks about her choice of not forcing her children to learn about their father's (Black) racial background, or any other aspect related to her ex-husband. But she indicated that she is willing to discuss it with her children if they show an interest in learning more about their father.

> Jane: As far as I know, the boys do not know their dad's racial background, and they have not had any interest in knowing, they have not questioned me or anyone else about their dad.

Jane's choice to not talk to her boys about their father could work as a shield to protect them from racial confusion. In addition she might feel uncomfortable to disclose details of her complicated relationship with their father.

Responding to Institutions' Request for Racial Labels for Multiracial Children

This subtheme demonstrates one factor that the participants perceived to be indicative of conventional gender role expectations. The paths these three women took to the point where they could choose a racial marker for their children, points to the fact that they were the ones responding to institutions' requests for racial labels for their children. I also found in their narratives recognition that perhaps the identity labels for their children would be different if the fathers were the ones responding to institutions' request for a racial marker for their children.

Nevertheless, these three participants exhibited a great sense of pride, power, and responsibility for this significant aspect of their children's lives.

The approach taken by Maria seems to justify her choice of racial identity for her children. Due to the fact that she is often the one taking on the role of opting for a racial marker for her children, Maria chooses her racial identity (Hispanic) for her children. Nevertheless, she often wonders about her mixed-race son's racial identity. She is not sure that labeling him Hispanic does justice to his African-American descent. Maria presumes that her African-American husband would choose his racial identity for their son, if he was the one to opt for a racial marker at school and other institutions.

> *María: A veces no estoy segura de que identidad racial escoger para mi hijo, porque mi hijo es una mezcla de hispano y Moreno. Y además de esto yo soy la que llena los formularios en la escuela, pero creo que si fuera mi esposo que llenara los formularios, con seguridad el marcaria que el es moreno.*
>
> Sometimes I wonder about my son's racial identity, because he is a mix of Hispanic and Black. I am the one who completes the school's forms, so I choose to label them as Hispanic. But I would guess that if my husband was the one completing those forms, he would probably choose Black as the racial identity for my children.

Although Maria takes pride in labeling her son Hispanic, she would like for her son to learn to appreciate his full heritage. Nonetheless, her son's sense of identity with his Multiracial heritage obviously hinges on his exposure to both cultures. In the end, because her son spends

more time with his mother, it is Maria's perception of race and her influence that will determine her son's racial identity, even if her choice might work to discount the totality of who her son is.

Cultural Currency as a Factor

Another significant aspect influencing the participants' decision to opt for a particular racial label for their children was the fact that as mothers these three women spent more time with their children than with their fathers. As a result the children are more exposed to the mothers' racial and cultural values. Sonia talks about not wanting her children to value one racial allegiance over another. She understands that choosing one race over another would prevent them from having dual cultural currency. Sonia explains that she often tries to encourage her children to embrace both racial backgrounds. She believes that her children can become better people, if they learn to appreciate both cultures.

> Sonia: At home we try to have them aware of the positive and negative side of both cultures. Having them learn about both cultures will hopefully help them be better people and everything.

Maria understands the impact of her children's exposure to her cultural racial backgrounds. But she is often divided between the loyalty to her racial heritage and the need for her husband's racial characterization to be also acknowledged. However, she takes solace in the fact that her children are cared for by her husband's family after school, which has helped to foster their sense of belonging to the African American culture.

María: Porque la familia de mi esposo siempre cuido a mi hijo después de la escuela, el ha aprendido mas el ingles y las costumbres de la familia de mi esposo. Pero a veces me pongo confundida porque no estoy segura de que identidad racial tiene mi hijo.

Due to the fact that my husband's family always takes care of my son after school, he has learned more English and the customs of my husband's family. Sometimes I get confused, because I don't know what racial identity to choose for my son.

For Sonia and Maria, their children should develop pride in their full racial heritage. This sentiment is echoed by Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) as they point out, that multiracial children with a healthy racial identity should not be concerned about embracing and celebrating their entire heritage. Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) suggest that children with a healthy racial identity are usually comfortable and at ease with their total family and cultural background, and these children are able to flexibly move between single-race groups. Wardle & Cruz-Janzen (2004) add that in reality, multiracial children do not need to put down, nullify, or demean any part of their heritage to feel good about their racial identity. That is precisely the sentiment echoed by Sonia, Maria and me, as we aspire to teach our children to embrace the totality of their racial heritage.

Checking Monoracial Boxes for Multiracial Children

When deciding what racial marker to choose for their multiracial children, these three women have to contend with the fact that they have been frequently asked to opt for a racial marker for their children without the option of choosing more than one box. In doing so, according to Chiong (1998), the real-life happening -- checking monoracial boxes for multiracial

children -- becomes a very substantial symbol of their lack of inclusion in the United States society.

All three participants recounted their concern for the fact that they had to choose only one box to identify their children's racial marker. Chiong (1998) explains that regardless of which group a multiracial individual chooses to identify with publicly, it is only normal that there might be a conflict with how that person identifies privately. The two participants that grew up not having to opt for a racial marker in their country of origin, resisted and resented having to do so in the United States. Conversely, Jane's experiences of living in a context in which racism was a law, led to her feeling less pressured to opt for a racial label for herself and her children as well.

Sonia has also been asked multiple times to choose a racial identity for her children, at school and at other institutions. However, she initially questioned the reasons why she had to opt for one race only. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2004) assert that when opting for a racial marker, a range of identity alternatives are possible, with no one single option being the best choice, or the most appropriate. In choosing only one box, Sonia is afraid of subjecting her children to the feeling of being caged by the constraint of monoracial categories that often impose certain social conducts. This feeling, in turn, leads Sonia to perceive racial identity as a private matter.

> Sonia: This is a private matter, the way I choose to label my children is a private matter, why does school need to do that? And then, they only had boxes for White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American and other. What is this with other? Are my children other?

Jane remained ambivalent about racial labels to give to her children. Her ambivalence stemmed from her own distinctive positioning of coming from the racially charged social context of South Africa, and her fear of racial discrimination against her children in the United States. On the other hand, she indicated that she has experienced choosing a racial label, and feels comfortable choosing monoracial boxes. In what follows, Jane demonstrated how the fact that she grew up accustomed to having to select a racial identity box, made it easier for her to choose a racial label for her children. Jane confirmed that her experiences of living in a context in which racism was a law, led to her feeling less pressured to opt for a racial label for her children.

> Jane: I have been asked many times to choose a racial label for my children and myself as well. But, I do not want to be consumed by what race I am, or what race my children are, I just want them to grow up to be good citizens, to be good people.

Jane fails to understand that her choice to label her children Asia-Indian could be interpreted as internalized racism. This misinterpretation and color blind approach is due in part to her preference to not opt for a racial marker related to ethnic groups that are considered to be at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in the United States. Allen (2005) explains this phenomenon by asserting that internalized racism takes place when people of color choose to adopt the Whites model of humanity and when they measure success and human value based on the Whites principles.

Racial Heritage Pride as a Racial Identity Determinant

Racial heritage pride was one of the most significant factors in determining participants' racial marker for themselves and their mixed-race children. Phinney (1990) holds that racial and

ethnic identity has been depicted as an intricate construct that consists of loyalty and a sense of belonging to one's ethnic group. In this study, the three participants pointed to racial heritage pride and loyalty to their cultural background as a direct influence on the racial indicator of their children. This sense of loyalty to their racial heritage worked to give the participants and their children a sense of worth and belonging.

Sonia explained why she opted to label herself as Latina, doing so with a remarkable sense of pride in her racial heritage. It was important for her to display that pride. It was as if she was sending a message that regardless of how people perceive her racial identity, she is still proud of it. Sonia expressed confidence and comfort with her self-chosen racial label, and the racial label chosen for her children. Nonetheless, while speaking about the labels people give her children, Sonia expressed displeasure and concern, because she also wants to acknowledge her children's full racial heritage. White heritage included.

Sonia's children could pass for White or Hispanic; however she indicated that she would prefer her children to embrace both racial identities. She desires to emphasize the positive and negative racial nuances of her children, rather than singling out one race. Rockquemore and Lazloffy (2005) speak to this concern as they argue that racial passing has a particular hold on our collective imagination because we assume that individuals belong to one, and only one, biologically defined racial group. Rockquemore and Lazloffy (2005) add that the problem with this postulation is that it bars the possibility of being mixed-race.

> Sonia: When asked about my racial identity here in the United States, I often label myself as Latina. Both my children have very light skin and blond hair, so when some people get

> to know that they are a mix of Latina and white American, they say things such as: "Wow, your children are beautiful" or "Wow, they do not look Hispanic" or "mixed-race children are gorgeous" or you know, "really! They look like normal American kids" [as if the American standard for race was White]. It bothers me.

Heritage racial pride was also a factor in Jane's decision to label her children Asian-Indian. Jane's account illustrates the pride in her racial background. However, it also indicates her desire to distinguish her racial identity from the Native-Americans – another involuntary minority group that is placed at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in the United States.

> Jane: I am very proud of my racial background, so I am always happy to identify myself as an Asian Indian. That's what I am, an Asian-Indian. But you know, here in the United States I still have to explain to people that I am an Asian-Indian, and not let's say a Native American.

Racial heritage definitely stood out in the mind of Maria. She is not only proud of her own racial heritage; she is also pleased that her immediate family has learned to embrace the Hispanic culture. Maria often attempts to teach her husband to embrace her Hispanic culture in the hope that he would accept her and be accepted by her Hispanic family as well. She demonstrated in her interview that she is particularly pleased with her children's ability to speak two languages and navigate two distinct cultures.

> *María: Tengo mucho orgullo de ser hispana, y por eso mis hijos son espanos. Pero también mi esposo habla bastante español, lo entiendo bastante, porque yo lo he ensenado a hablar español. Mi hija y mi hijo también hablan los dos lenguajes muy bien.*

Pero tengo mucho orgullo de mis hijos por hablar dos lenguajes. Yo quiero que sepan mi cultura, tengo mucho orgullo de mi cultura hispana.

I am very proud to be Hispanic, and that is why I labeled my children Hispanic. But my husband also has learned to speak a lot of Spanish. Both my children speak English and Spanish. I am very proud of them for knowing how to speak two different languages. This is really good. I really want my children to know my culture, I am very proud of my culture.

Maria speaks of the importance of her family's ability to speak her native language and embrace her Mexican culture. The fact that they are enthusiastic about accepting her language and culture work to facilitate Maria's resolve to raise her children with a sense of kinship for Hispanic heritage.

The Impact of Racial Indicators on the Educational Experience of Multiracial Children

The principal guiding research question for this study was, *"what factors have influenced mothers of multiracial children's decision to choose a particular racial indicator for their children, and how has this choice impacted the educational experience of their children in the Sumter County School District?"* My experience with this study's participants reinforces my conviction that their belief in racial equality was shaped largely by their awareness of how their multiracial children would be viewed in the community and the schools.

For example, Jane believes that the racial labels given to her children strongly impact their educational experience. Thus, she is clearly concerned about the way schools group the children, and have expectations based on race. Within this concern for the way the schools group

these children, fear of discrimination, fear of lower expectations and underachievement emerge as significant factors. In turn this fear of racial discrimination substantiates Jane's concern about her children being prevented from participating in some activities at school as a result of being dark-skinned. But most importantly, she also thinks that the fact that her children are not viewed as one single distinct race prevents them from being chosen to participate in some important school activities. Here Jane's account highlights the social construction of racial identity labeling in the Sumter County Schools, which is a source of apprehension for her.

> Jane: Sometimes I wonder why my children are not chosen for some activities at school, or if they are chosen to participate as well because of their race and their ethnicity. So, many times I have asked myself if perhaps they would have been chosen if they were racially labeled as Black, White or any other single race.
>
> Everyone has cliques in this area, so I often wonder why I was not invited, or why my children were not invited. Could it be because of the fact that my children do not have a specific race? Other times I wonder if my children are discounted because I am a single mother of young boys. For example, a couple of weeks ago the school had to choose one student to be awarded a scholarship, and my son was not awarded that particular scholarship, but a White girl was chosen. So, I started to wonder if race had anything to do with it. But you know, even if my boys are multiracial, I always mark them as Asian-Indian, because their dad [who is a mix of Jamaican and African American] is not involved in their lives at all. They have embraced my culture, and whatever values I teach them. I teach them to be tolerant and accepting of everyone, regardless of who they are.

> In reality, I wished the choice of any particular racial identity would not make any difference, on the educational experiences of my children, but I think that it really does, it really does, because you know, at school they group all the races in separate bundles, and they expect more or less from the children based on their racial identity. For example, hum, I'm trying to not be crude, but I might come across as biased, you know, when they talk about African American children, they think of them as… or the perception that African American children are not so smart, and that's sad that people think like that. Some people might think that African American children are not as interested in education, you know.

Another understanding of the social construct of racial labels in the Sumter schools is given by Maria. Although Maria claims that she is not aware of racial discrimination against her children, she mentions that occasionally at school her children have to deal with racial slurs and covert discrimination, such as "go home wetback," "take your swine flu infected self back to Mexico." Even though, Maria and her family are legal United States citizens, she chooses not to contest these issues at school. She does not trust that her newly acquired United States citizenship would protect her against this type of discrimination.

> *María: A veces unos niños llaman los Mexicanos de mojados, pero no las maestras. Y dicen que nosotros los mejicanos debemos regresar a nuestro país, oh nos dicen que somos los ilegales, los indocumentados. Pero no nos gusta pelear con esas personas, aun que somos legales aquí en los Estados Unidos.*

Sometimes kids call the Mexicans wet backs, but I don't think the teachers would do that. At times, they say that we should go back to Mexico, or that we are illegal, undocumented. But I don't like to fight with these people, even if we are legal U.S. citizens.

Although racial heritage pride emerged as one of the most significant factors influencing Maria's choice of racial identity for her children, the impact of that choice on her son's experiences at school equally affected her decision. In the interview Maria told me that to some extent she is scared to label her son African-American. She is fully aware of the injustices and multiple challenges faced by African-Americans. Maria maintains that she does not want to discriminate against African Americans, but she does not want her son to endure the same harsh treatment that other members of her husband's extended family have been forced to endure.

Maria might not know how to articulate the racial hierarchy of the United States, but she understands that in some cases Hispanics enjoy more favorable treatment than Blacks. And as a result, Maria believes that labeling her son Hispanic rather than African American could influence the way people treat him.

María: Tengo miedo por mi hijo, porque miro que es mas difícil ser un hombre moreno, de que ser un hombre hispano. Yo miro que la vida es muy difícil para los morenos, porque muchas personas blancas son racistas y no les gustan los morenos y los espanos. Si, yo miro que lo tratan mejor por ser hispano.

I confess that I am very scared to label my son African-American, because I see that it is a lot more difficult to be a Black man. Life is too difficult for Blacks, because the Whites don't like Blacks and Hispanics. Yes, I see that they treat him well because he is

> Hispanic. But I don't know how they would treat him if I have chosen to label him as Black.

Sonia for her part does not know the extent of the impact that racial identity label chosen for her children have on their educational experience. Nevertheless, she assumes that the choice of Latin-American has had some impact in their learning experience. But she also expresses frustration while talking about the perceived difference in customs. She contends that her children feel discouraged to go to school when they are teased by classmates that have limited experience with dual heritage issues. In the following scenario Sonia talks about the cultural shock that her children have to face and she also talks about people assuming that her children do not speak English simply because they are Hispanic.

> Sonia: Like you know, when my children are at school, and we speak another language, the other kids pick on my children, and start saying that they don't understand it. And that makes my children feel uncomfortable, makes them not want to be at school sometimes, and that might, you know, make my kids not to do well in school. But, because I come from a multicultural background, my kids see that I am right in pushing them to adopt more than one culture, to learn to be accepting, right? You see, my children travel a lot, they have the opportunity to see other cultures, so when they see other people that are afraid of different culture, they think it is wrong, they think that they should distance themselves from friends that are not as tolerant.

The fact that most of Sonia's children's classmates have limited exposure to other countries, languages and cultures is a barrier between Sonia's children and their monoracial

classmates. Valdez (1996) explains that most immigrant children coming to United States schools have to deal with a different code of power, one that is often not acknowledged by schools because the schools' code of power is different from what these students know. These codes according to Valdez (1996) are based on factors such as family traditions, cultural differences, language, and practical survival skills that parents try to teach their children.

"Rather than think of these diverse students as problems,
we can view them instead as resources
who can help all of us learn
what it feels like to move between
cultures and language varieties
and thus perhaps better learn
how to become citizens of
the global community"
(Lisa Delpit)

How people experience race within their social network is very important. In Sonia's case the challenges to navigate the convoluted racial relations of the United States is not limited only to her children at school. Sonia has struggled to understand all nuances of race relations in the United States. Nonetheless, her biggest resentment is towards the Whites who choose to send their children to All-White private schools or White-flight public schools. In the following account Sonia describes her experience of having to deal with the fact that her children are perceived by the Whites as inferior because they attend public schools with mostly Black and Hispanic students.

> Sonia: It is almost as if it is a disease to have your children enrolled in public school. It is very sad, but I think that they act this way towards public school because the majority of the students in Sumter County are African-American. At times you can clearly see that they do not want to be friends with you just because you have children in public school.

There is no question that racism was the foremost factor influencing the prevalent establishment of All-White private schools. According to Sonia, the Whites who opt for the White -flight often treats her children with condescension and disdain once they find out that her children attend public school with Black children. Sonia is fully aware of the hidden racism in this group of people's contempt for public schools.

Awareness of Self Racial Identity as Result of Having Multiracial Children

In this study I explored the participants' understanding of their own racial identity as result of having multiracial children. I also attempted to examine how and under what circumstances that understanding shapes their view of themselves and the view of other people in the community. Luke (1994) claims that mothers of mixed-race children are seldom talked about in scholarly research. When they are mentioned, they are simply referred to as heritage markers of their children, not as individuals who have an ethnic and racial identity of their own. Unlike me, the participants in this study might have never had the necessity or the opportunity to examine their own racial identity, or to explore the challenges and privileges that come with their racial identity choices. But two of them demonstrated that having multiracial children contributed to their perception of their own racial identity due to the constant reminders of their children's blurred racial identity.

Jane's family chooses not to talk openly about mixed-race identity issues; thus, her sons understand their racial identity as exclusively Asian-Indian. And as such, her sons experience the world as Asian-Indians. In making this choice, Jane relied on colorblind discourses to negate the impact of her sons' racial identity on her own racial identity. Therefore, she does not seem to see a correlation between her children's racial identity and her awareness of her own racial identity. Once again her choices indicate a degree of lack of interest in race and racial issues. Perhaps, this colorblind approach may have stemmed from her previous experience with racism in South Africa.

I would argue that perhaps declining to acknowledge racism would work to protect her children from dealing with it. Nakazawa (2003) argues that for some parents – often minority parents – their own experiences in the past were difficult enough to prompt them to avoid discussing race with their children, in order to circumvent difficult memories of racial discrimination. Nakazawa (2003) adds that maybe the most disconcerting reason why some parents avoid discussing race with their children is because they want their multiracial children to acknowledge one heritage while rejecting their other racial background. However, (Nakazawa, 2003) argues that telling a child that, although they are multiracial, they should identify with only one race is bound to cause difficulties with their racial identity in the long term.

In our conversation, Jane often sought to play down the notion of race in her multiracial children. Chiong (1998), like Nakazawa (2003), asserts that, because they are required to acknowledge only part of their racial heritage, multiracial children in principle do not exist as a distinct group, which in turn affects how the American public perceives them. How society

perceives multiracial children (Chiong 1998) appears to be a very powerful influence on how their mothers view themselves and their children racially. Similarly, the way in which society views Jane's children seems to impact how she views herself and her sons' racial identity.

> Jane: I'm not sure that the fact that my children are mixed-race makes any difference to me. I am who I am, regardless of my children's racial identity.

Contrary to Jane, Sonia expresses different feelings about the relationship between her children's racial indicator and her own racial identity. She acknowledges that the perception of her own ethnic and cultural identity has been influenced by her experience as a mother of multiracial children. But the problem arises from her insight that this perception has left her with a sense of not belonging to the Sumter County area, a community which is paralyzed by the bipolar Black-White racial context.

> Sonia: You know, while I am wondering about my children's racial identity, I am also thinking, well, what is my real racial identity in the mind of these people? Then, I think, well, if I am not White, I am not Black, in this culture I don't exist. There's something missing, I don't know. And that makes me wonder about my place in this community, my racial identity.

Maria might have never had the necessity or the opportunity to examine her own racial identity, or to explore the challenges and privileges that come with it. However, her accounts illustrate how she has changed her outlook on racial identity due to the constant reminders of her son's indistinct racial identity.

María: Pues cuando yo estaba solita en la comunidad hispana, no me preocupaba mucho con esto de identidad racial, pero cuando estoy en la comunidad de mi esposo, y me comparan con mi hijo, y con la familia de el, entonces si miro que mi identidad racial es más fuerte. O sea miro que soy diferente de mi hijo.

Well, before my son was born I did not even think about issues related to race, but after he was born I have to be constantly thinking about his racial identity, and it forces me to also think about my own racial identity. And the more I think about it, the more I am proud of being a Hispanic woman.

An interesting aspect of Maria's response is how she demonstrated admiration and love for her son. But yet as she judged her Hispanic racial identity against his Black racial identity she indicated that it was better to be Hispanic than Black. Allen (2005) contends that these struggles among people of color, makes it very difficult to develop a cross-racial collectivity.

Maria struggled to find the language to express her love for her son at the same that she tried to be loyal to her race. Nevertheless, she has a certain level of understanding that her views on race and her attitude towards race and racial differences could hinder or promote a positive outlook and healthy self image on her son. This is not an easy task for Maria, because at the same time that she would like for her son to have a sense of belonging to both sides of his racial heritage, she also understands the risks and benefits of choosing to identify with a race perceived at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to create a history of the lived experiences of three women of color – who like me are mothers of multiracial children – and to gain multiple perspectives on their experience with gender and racial identity issues in the context of United States. In addition, this study focused on exploring our choices of racial indicator for our children and the impact that raising multiracial children would have on our own racial identity.

A Final Consideration

Building on existing literature, throughout this study I have attempted to demonstrate that gender and race are significant factors in these three women's lived experiences. The participants' accounts revealed how different aspects of sexism, racism, heritage pride, and racial invisibility have been a part of their lives, and influenced the choices of racial indicators for their multiracial children. There was ample evidence from the stories of these three participants that the racial identity indicator of their multiracial children and the consequences of these choices, provided a more significant set of apprehensions than the concerns these three women had for their own gender and racial identity issues.

Although I have not faced the same set of problems with gender discrimination as my study's participants have faced, sexism continues to be a very significant source of concern for me. Unlike my participants, I did not endure abusive relationships; neither did I have to leave a partner due to domestic abuse. But I have endured and witnessed other acts of discrimination

against me and/or other women. Perhaps another difference between my study's participants and me lies on the fact that I was keenly aware of sexism before moving to the United States. This awareness of covert and overt sexism stems from years of involvement with women's rights organization and my ensuing awareness of multiple ways that women (particularly women of color) are persistently victimized. My hope is that this study will add to the literature that work to raise awareness of the multiple ways that women are robbed of their most basic rights – particularly as race and gender intersect – and in the process influence educational practices that would foster similar awareness.

Moreover, I have learned through this inquiry that oral histories present a significant measure of mutual production of understanding between the researcher and the participants. Accordingly, through this mutual understanding, the women in this study have spoken of the importance of choosing a racial marker for their children and the implications it would have on their children's educational experiences in Sumter County. Additionally, I have learned how other women of color raising a multiracial family deal with issues of race and gender. Through oral histories they have also spoken of their intimate relationship with someone who is characterized as dissimilar from their racial background (their mixed-race children and husbands). As a result of these relationships these three women and I as well, have been required to deal with issues of racism and prejudice in a way that we have not experienced prior to moving to the United States.

In many ways this inquiry presented a great opportunity for me to observe how we – researcher and participants – are all unique, and yet learned to appreciate each other for our

similarities and differences. For instance, although, these three participants and I may have shown evidence of characteristics that justify similarities in racial identity matters, we also displayed enough differences to make ourselves unique in our struggles to overcome racism, sexism and invisibility.

Two of the participants agreed that because they dealt with limited issues of race and gender in their country of origin, the experiences in their home country did not prepare them to deal with the issues of race and ethnicity that they encountered in the United States. However, one of the participants demonstrated through her account of previous race and gender experiences in her country of origin, that she understood the depth of racial discrimination and monoracial assumptions in the United States context. But yet she chose to take a racially blind approach. This argument indicates that perhaps Jane does not understand the paradox of her choices because her choice of color blindness stands in stark contrast to her lived experience with racism in South Africa. The justification for this ambivalent and colorblind attitude might be found in her desire to protect her sons from experiences of racial discrimination similar to what she had to endure in South Africa.

As I listened to what my study participants had to say about their choice of racial identity for their multiracial children, I also reflected on what has influenced my decisions to choose a racial marker for my children. Like my participants, I also take pride in my racial heritage, which did indeed affect the choice of racial marker for my sons. Although, I do not often mark Brazilian on one of those monoracial boxes, when asked what they are – in reference to their race – my sons and I often declare that we are Brazilian.

Unlike my study's participants, my children spend considerably more time with my husband Wayne than with me – particularly as I work on my schooling. Consequently, my husband is often the one completing forms at school, at doctors' offices, and other institutions. Perhaps that is why my children are more inclined to embrace their full racial heritage.

At home we do not seek to minimize the concept of race; rather, we often encourage our sons to discuss not only their racial identity, but also to be critical of all racial constructs. Regardless of my choice of racial identity, my aspiration is to raise my children as individuals aware of discriminatory practices such as racism, sexism and classism. I aspire for my sons to be concerned with social justice and the collective good of all people. I strongly believe that my children will learn to be racially tolerant by observing how their parents interact with people from a broad spectrum of race and origin, and how we engage ourselves on the fight to promote equality.

In order to promote racial awareness in our sons, we also persistently encourage them to have a broad range of friends, read and learn about other cultures, and learn to view all these factors critically. My sons could pass for White, Hispanic and Multiracial, but for most part they label themselves as Multiracial – unless the discussion involves soccer, when they claim exclusively Brazilian heritage. My husband and I also choose to label them Multiracial.

In order to reinforce this perception, both my husband and I make every effort to expose our children to their entire racial heritage. We often travel to Brazil, and persuade them to embrace and to learn about their intricate racial identity in Brazil. As for the white part of their racial make-up, because my father-in-law was a Mormon, our sons have been exposed to a

detailed history of their European heritage, and they have equally acknowledged this aspect of their racial identity.

As I have mentioned above, I have tried to encourage my sons to value all facets of their racial heritage, and in doing so, I hope that they will learn not only to be tolerant of others, but also to join in the fight for racial equality and the collective good throughout the world.

Liston (2001) holds that "the more language we have within a given field, the more presence the ideas and objects of that area have on us" (p. 57). In many ways, this study has provided me not only with the language of the given field, but also with an enhanced outlook on gender, racial identity, multiracial issues, racial heritage pride, and intersecting realities in the United States. And in so doing, this experience has equipped me with the tools to better understand and articulate gender and racial concerns, racial identity issues of my own multiracial children and of multiracial individuals in general.

As a result of this heightened consciousness, I suggest that much can and should be done to reconsider monoracial assumptions and gender discrimination in Sumter County, and hopefully foster discussions about racial and gender equality. Davison (1996) posits that there has been an upsurge of discussion about diversity among people in the United States, with people of color pushing for broader representation within the political and public spheres. Davison (1996) adds that this increased discussion has reflected particularly in discourse concerning public education, with debates raging around the content of the curriculum, the nature of culturally sensitive pedagogy, and the provision of education to immigrant children.

Hopefully, these discussions and reconsiderations will work to inform public debate about the complexities of the lives of Multiracial individuals and their intersecting realities, and as a result help to shape the curriculums in our schools, and to shape the education and integration of Multiracial individuals such as my sons, and the children of my participants in the broader society.

Recommendations for Further Scholarship

This study has taken my participants and me on a voyage to new fronts, new areas of reflection and new experiences. We have shared precious memories of our lives in our country of origin; we have explored the challenges we share as women of color raising multiracial families, and we have discovered new areas of struggles and rejoiced as we discussed the challenges and the positive aspects of raising a multiracial family.

In detecting new challenges and joys, I propose areas that perhaps entail further research. Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) posit that, as the mixed-race population continues to grow in the United States, so has the need to come up with new models of understanding about the racial identity of multiracial children. Thus, in what follows I make recommendations for future research and consequently, new understanding of mixed-race identity issues.

For instance, a study of multiracial children's own choice of racial identity indicator is warranted to understand how their mothers deal with their own racial identity. It would also be interesting to explore what is taking place educationally for women of color born outside the United States, and how their educational background would affect their understanding of gender and racial issues in a monoracial context. It could also be productive to conduct further research

on White mothers of multiracial children. Furthermore, a research addressing the role of language in construing the racial identity of multiracial individuals is warranted.

Another avenue of inquiry would be to compare the experiences of single mothers of multiracial children, and how the absence of a monoracial father would influence racial identity choices. Two of the participants remarried to a second husband, and they also had children in these new relationships. Therefore, these reconfigurations of families bring forth a number of concerns that so far have not been explored adequately.

Last of all, future research efforts could include study groups activities in which women of color mothers of multiracial children would get together to explore, discuss, reflect and get involved in an effort to educate the broader community, educators and stakeholders on how to implement practices and create policies that are sensitive to Multiracial students' unique needs.

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APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF RESPONDENTS' INFORMATION

Major Facts that Surfaced from Individual Participants' First Interview			Major Facts that Surfaced from Participants' Second Interview		
1 - Maria	2 – Jane	3 – Sonia	1 - Maria	2 - Jane	3 - Sonia
1. Have not experienced racism before moving to United States. 2. Was born in a state sanctioned segregated society. Experienced profound racism before moving to the United States. Due to intense segregation in her country of origin, she did not have much interaction with people of other race or ethnic background. 3. Raised in multicultural community. No racial awareness before moving to U.S.			1. Identify both children as Hispanic, but wonders about her mixed-race children). Children were born in the United States. 2. Is frequently asked about her race and her children's race. 3. Have two children from two different fathers. One born in the United States, the other born in Paraguay.		
1. Have not experienced racism before moving to United States. 2. Was surrounded by many different types of races, but lived in very segregated racial boundaries. Community perceived them a step higher than the native Africans due to lighter color skin tone. 3. Lack of awareness kept her from exploring her racial identity.			1. Choose her racial identity for her children. Figures the husband would choose his racial identity for the children. 2. The fact that she lives with her parents, coupled by the fact that the boys father is not present in her life, makes her to opt for Asian-Indian racial marker.		

	3. Received some sort of abuse by the first partner
1. Did not grow up interacting with people of different race. 2. Moved away from her country of origin due to difficulties with overt racial discrimination. In country of origin went to segregated Asia-n school. Understood the perceived racial tensions and the whites' sense of superiority. Used to choosing mandatory racial identity labeling. 3. Had some interaction with other races as growing up. Chose to identify with the dominant racial group – descendents of Europeans. Treats everyone with respect, regardless of racial background. Locals treated as invisible. Chose to have respect for the other race, and recognized their values. The lack of diversity as growing up, made it easy to deal with racial issues. perceived other races as exotic, different, exciting. Check invisibility of Guaranis. (was oblivious to the oppression suffered by the Native-Indians	1. Sees a conflict between both sides of the family in choosing a racial label for her son. 2. Desire for a normal family (with a father and mother) for her children. Choose not to force the children to learn about their father's racial background. 3. Identify children with the same racial label that she uses to describe herself. Very proud of her racial heritage
1. Arrived at a very diverse state such as California when first coming to U.S. 2. Shocked to see how people from	1 .Feels confused about the racial identity of her son, expresses profound love for her son and wonders if he is Mexican-American).

different races interacted in the United States. 3. Did not have much racial awareness before moving to the United States).	2 Expressed dissatisfaction with the way schools group children, and have expectations based on race. Believes that racial the racial labels given to children strongly impact their educational experiences. 3 Thinks that her racial marker is the best for her children.
1. Learned to interact with people of different races in the U.S. 2. Was shocked by the lack of diversity in Americus – Georgia, due to the persistent bipolar black and white racial struggles. had difficulties blending in with another culture and races. 3. Previous experience did not prepare her for racial challenges in the United States). The situation in Georgia seems to be more grave than in Washington D.C. and Florida	1. Pride is one factor that influenced her choice of racial identity for her children. 2. Have witnessed biased and mistreatment behavior of some children simply because they are black. 3. Believes that her children can become better people, if they learn to appreciate both cultures
1. Very proud of racial heritage and identity. 2. People had difficulty defining her racial identity. Parents labeled her as Asian-Indian would gladly choose a box to identify. 3. Invisibility of all races that are not within the bipolar black and white racial discussion	1. She is very scared to label her son African-American. Is fully aware of the multiple challenges faced by African-American men. 2. Prefers to have her children labeled as Asian-Indian rather than African American, because life is too hard for African American. 3. Started to consider multiracial identity

	for her children as result of this study.
1. Not aware of racial discrimination endured by her children. 2. Expressed tolerance towards racially different people. Expressed concerns for the way other people labeled her. First non-white enrolled at an all white private school. Believes that the fact that her children cannot be defined as one single race, prevents them from been chosen to participate in some important activities. 3. Label herself as Latina, very proud of it, expressed confidence and comfort with self-chosen racial label.	1. Believes that the fact that she labels her son Hispanic rather than African-American influences the way people treat him. 2. Grew up used to having to choose a race, so does not mind having to choose a race for her children. 3. Tolerance, multiculturalism, awareness of differences. Assume that the choice of racial identity label for her children has impacted their learning experience.
1. Has a child from previous marriage. 2. Had difficulties adapting to the all white private school. Was fully aware of the private school begins to resist school desegregation. Had a sense that she did not belong at the all-white private school. 3. Expressed displeasure and concern with labels people give her children. Wants	1. It means a lot to her to have multiracial children. She feels likes he is very special because he is multiracial and knows how to navigate two cultures. 2. Expresses displeasure with the fact that her race is somewhat invisible. 3. The perceived difference in culture makes her children want to avoid school). Acceptance, multiculturalism. Tolerance.

to emphasize the positive and negative of racial nuances of her children.	
1. Had difficulties with the father of first child (sexism and some sort of abuse). 2. Resented sexist comments. The husband has abandoned the family. Talked about family's cultural background practice of arranged marriage. Children have embraced her culture as a mother. 3. Treated differently because people think that she is from Europe or that she is Caucasian.	1. Has changed her outlook on her own racial identity due to constant reminds of her son's indistinct racial identity. 2. Has changed racial identity perception as a result of having multiracial children. 3. Assume multiracial identity of the children, and it's very proud of it. Emphasizes advantages of been multiracial. Have been asked multiple times to choose a racial identity for her children, at school and other institutions. Initially questioned the reasons why she had to opt for one race only.
1. Very happy to be married to a husband of a different race. 2. People at different places in the community show interest in her racial background. 3. Blacks seem more comfortable and at home when they realize that she is not White-American.	3. Perceive racial identity as a private matter. Emphasizes awareness of children's multiracial origin. Voices discontent with the limited bipolar black and white racial discussion). Feels a sense of not belonging to the community, due to her racial identity. Wants children to be proud of their racial heritage, but not arrogant or have a sense of superiority
1. Counts on family members to support mixed-race marriage. 2. Was raised in a patriarchal family where the man is the head of the family. Disappointed family members by not marrying someone they approved.	

3. White-Americans seem less comfortable and at home when they realize that she is not White-American. Seems to resent some of the White-Americans distrust.	
1. Fears lack of support for mixed-race marriage from family members. 2. Complains about the bipolar black and white racial discussion. Upset about people's perception of her as pretty rather than intelligent. 3. At times feel out of place with White-Americans	
1. Has chosen to help her partner to embrace her culture too. 2. Believes that her children could be deprived from participating in some school activities because of their racial identity. Suffered emotional verbal and physical abuse from husband. 3. Seems to see some hypocrisy in the way Whites deal with racial marker. Resent Whites disdain for her children once they find out that they attend public school with Blacks.	
1 Very proud of racial heritage. 2 Pride in racial background. 3 Aware of hidden racism in white – Americans' disdain for public schools. Have also been disappointed with black-Americans because her friendship with them have not had good outcomes. Would like to move to other areas that offer a more positive race-relations.	
1 Sees difference between her multiracial family and other monoracial families. 2 Would like to relate equally to everyone, but understand that the black students at work rather rely on her black assistant. Wish for her children to be	

tolerant. 3 Perceived difference between multiracial families and monoracial families.	
1. Is aware of the challenges faced by a multiracial family. 2. Expresses satisfaction due to the fact that her children relate well to friends of all races. But understand that most of their friends are either white or multiracial. Would like to live in a more diverse community, for the sake of her children and for her own sake. 3. Perception of race has changed.	
1. (has tried to understand the way people try to separate and segregate themselves based on race). 2 Have changed the perception of race since moving to United States, does not understand the distrust in both white and black-Americans.	
1. Relates with Blacks, Whites and Hispanics in her church and work. 2. 3. Had different race relations in Paraguay and Brazil.	
1. Racism - Feels that the Whites who generally work as supervisors and office clerks are one step higher than she is. 3 Proud to show family's history of helping and accepting African.-American	
1. (Resents the race relations with both blacks and whites as well). 2. 3. Have some friendship with people of other race, but does not understand the black Americans resistance to make friends with her	

1. Sees how education translates into better Jobs.	

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT DATA SHEET

Please choose a pseudonym: _____

(A pseudonym is a false name that will be used when referring to you during interviews, data analysis, publication, and presentations. Using a pseudonym helps to ensure your confidentiality).

The following information will help in understanding your data in relation to other participants in this study who may share similar or different characteristics. As with all information you give, it will be kept confidential.

Name:_____Age_____

Racial ethnic background_____

Racial background of spouse_____

Languages spoken_____

Languages spoken at home:_____

1. Where were you born?_____
2. How long have you lived in the United States?_____
3. Did you attend school in the United States?_____Where?_____
4. Do you have children? _____If so, how many? _____
5. What are the ages of your children?_____
6. What is the school grade of your children?_____

APPENDIX C

SURVEY

Participant and Researcher Comparative Form

Participants	Education	Country of Origin	Racial Identity of Children	Racial Identity of Spouse	Experience with Overt Racism in Country of Origin	Victim of Domestic abuse	Age of Children
Maria	GED	Mexico	*Hispanic (both parents Mexican) *Multiracial (Mexican mother, Black father)	Black	No	Psychological and verbal	13 06
Jane	Master in business	South Africa	*Both children: (Mother: Asian-Indian. Father: Black)	Black	State sanctioned Apartheid	Psychological Verbal, and physical	12 11
Sonia	College	Brazil Paraguay	*Hispanic (Hispanic mother and father). *Hispanic mother, White father	White	No	Psychological and verbal	13 11
Gera (researcher)	Doctor of Education	Brazil	*Both children Multiracial (Mother: Latina. Father: White).	White	Racial hierarchy and racial democracy	No experience with domestic abuse	13 11

APPENDIX D

Interview Procedure

Title Project: Critical narrative of multiracial women's personal journey: Negotiating the intersectionality of race and gender issues in a monoracial paradigm

Principal Investigator: Geralda Silva Nelson, Doctoral Student, Georgia Southern University

Project Supervisor: Dr. Delores D. Liston, Professor, Georgia Southern University

First interview

Prior to interview

Introduce study

Informed consent

Choose pseudonym

Closing

Is there anything you would like to add?

After interview

Thanks

Directions for next interview

Set up next interview

Second interview

Prior to interview

Welcome

Reconfirm consent

Follow-up from first interview

Anything else that you thought of after first interview?

Closing

What, if anything, would you like to add? Is there anything I should have asked but did not?

After interview

Thank participant for their willingness to share their stories and for their time.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE - ENGLISH

Interview 1

Purpose: To discuss racial identity of participant before moving to the United States, and to explore changes in perceptions of racial issues after moving to the United States.

1. Please tell me some stories about your early childhood experiences with race. What was your ethnic background growing up?
2. Tell me about your life before moving to the United States. Were you ever concerned about your racial identity?
3. What, if any, ethnic or racial marker did you use to describe yourself in your country of origin?
4. Did you grow up interacting with people from different racial background?
5. If so, please tell me about your interactions – in your community, school, etc. – with people of different races other than your own before coming to the United States.
6. Tell me about your life since coming to the United States, especially your perceptions of racial identity.
7. Now that you are in the United States, how do you identify yourself to others in terms of race/ethnicity?
8. Tell me about any occurrence you have had in which your racial identity and the racial identity of your children have been, validated and accepted.

9. Tell me about any experience you have had in which your racial identity and the racial identity of your children have been contested, challenged, ignored, or dismissed.
10. How do you think your experience in an interracial family differs from that of monoracial families?
11. Tell me how you have changed – if any at all – in regard to how you think about race and racial issues since coming to the U.S.?
12. Tell me about your interactions with people of different races other than your own, in your children's school and your community here in the United States.

Interview 2

Purpose: To examine in more details the specific areas associated with race, especially as it relates to raising multiracial/multiethnic children attending school at Sumter County Schools district.

1. At our first interview, we talk about your experience with your own racial identity. Today I would like to discuss about your children's racial identity. But first tell me how many children do you have?
2. Were they born outside of the United States?
3. What, if any, ethnic or racial marker do you use to describe your children?
4. What factors – if any – have influenced your decision to choose a particular racial indicator for your children?
5. Has this choice impacted the education experience of your children in the Sumter County School District? If so, how?
6. What does it mean to you to have multiracial/multiethnic children?
7. Have you ever been asked to choose a race for your children on school forms, hospital, etc.?
8. If so, tell me how you felt about it?
9. Has the perception of your own ethnic and cultural identity been influenced by your experience as a mother of multiracial children? For example, after having to choose a racial identity for your children you started wondering about your own racial identity. If so, how?

10. Is there anything else that we have not discussed in the two interviews that you would like to talk about or add?

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW GUIDE - SPANISH

Entrevista 1

Propósito: Para discutir la identidad racial de los participantes antes de moverse para los Estados Unidos, y para explorar los cambios de percepciones racial después de moverse para los Estados Unidos.

1. Por favor platíqueme de su experiencia con las cosas de sus raíces raciales en su infancia. Que identidad racial usava usted en su ninez?
2. Háble me un poco de su vida antes de moverse para los Estados Unidos. Usted alguna vez ha estado preocupada con su identidad racial?
3. Que identidad racial has usado usted en su país para describir usted misma?
4. En su país has crecido con personas de raza diferentes?
5. Se has tenido esta clase de experiencia, por favor platíqueme un poco de su relación con esas personas en su comunidad, escuela, iglesia, etc.
6. Por favor platíqueme un poco sobre su vida desde que llegaste a los Estados Unidos.
7. Ahora que estas en los Estados Unidos, que identificación racial usa usted con las otras personas?
8. Dígame sobre cualquier ocurrencia en que usted haya tenido en cual su identidad racial y la identidad racial de sus hijas/hijos haya sido validada y aceptado.
9. Dígame sobre cualquier experiencia que usted haya tenido en el cuál se han disputado, se han desafiado, no han hecho caso, o han ignorado su identidad racial y la identidad racial de sus niñas/niños.
10. Usted ve su experiencia en una familia interracial diferente de la de experiencia de familias monoracial?
11. Dígame cómo ha cambiado su pensamiento con respecto a otras personas de diferentes razas, desde que llego a los E.E U.U.
12. Dígame como son sus relaciones con las personas de diferentes razas, la de sus hijos en la escuela y la comunidad aquí en los Estados Unidos.

Entrevista 2

Propósito: Ahora hablaremos sobre áreas mas especificas sobre el racismo, especialmente acerca de la crianza de niños multirraciales y multiétnicos que atienden a la escuela de sus hijos.

1. En nuestra primera entrevista, hablamos de su experiencia con la identidad racial suya. Quisiera hoy hablar sobre la identidad racial de sus niños. ¿Pero primero dígame cuántos niños usted tiene?

2. Sus hijos nacieron en los Estados Unidos o otro país?
3. Que identidad racial usa para describir sus hijos?
4. Qué factores han influenciado en su decisión para elegir un indicador racial para sus niños?
5. Esta opción ha afectado la experiencia de la educación de sus niños en la escuela estatal de Sumter? ¿Si su respuesta es "si" digame como?
6. Qué significa para usted tener niños multirraciales/multiétnicos?
7. Nunca le han pedido elegir una raza para sus niños en formas de la escuela, hospital, el etc.?
8. Si es así dígame cómo usted se sentiría?
9. La opinión de su propia identidad étnica y cultural ha sido influenciada por su experiencia como madre de niños multirraciales?
10. Por ejemplo: después Al tener que elegir una identidad para sus hijos, como se ha sentido al respecto. ¿Si es así dígame por qué?
11. Quiere agregar algo que no se ha discutido aquí en las dos entrevistas?

APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Georgia Southern University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM

CONSENT

I, _____agree to participate in the research that is titled *"Critical narrative of multiracial women's personal journey: Negotiating the intersectionality of race and gender issues in a monoracial paradigm"* which is being conducted by Geralda S. Nelson, graduate Student, working under the direction of Dr. Delores Liston at Georgia Southern University. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary; therefore I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

The purpose of this research is to examine racial identification choices of mothers of mixed-race children.

Your participation in the study would consist of the following:

• A minimum of two 50-minute interviews about your views on raising multiracial/multiethnic children in a monoracial paradigm. The interviews will be conducted in person, at a location that is convenient to you. Confidentiality will be accorded all participants. For example, the records will be coded and pseudonyms will be used during recordings. I will be the only one to have access to your identity, for I will personally transcribe the interviews. The interview recording will be stored at a locked cabinet at my home office. The results of this study will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without prior consent unless otherwise required by law. The interviews – should be outlined using open-ended

questions, nonetheless, further remarks and questions should be expected to arise depending on the discussion.

The above methods of data collection will require minimal interference in your life. There is a small possibility that you may feel uncomfortable sharing your views relating to struggles against sexism, prejudice and stereotypes toward multiracial/multiethnic individuals.

You can choose a pseudonym to protect your identity. All participants will receive copies of their interview transcripts, but the participants will not have access to other participants' interview transcripts except by written permission of the participant.

I expect this study to benefit you by providing you some time to reflect on racial socialization factors that would impact the learning environment and experiences of your multiracial/multiethnic children in the Sumter County Schools District. By participating in this project you will have the opportunity to interact with mothers that have had similar or different experiences. In addition, this study will help to increase the awareness of educators supporting struggles against racism, sexism, prejudice and stereotypes toward multiracial students. And hopefully this increased awareness will help to cultivate gender and culturally responsive teaching.

If you have questions about this study – now or during the course of the project – I can be contacted at 229 942 0866 (cell) or 931 0425 (home), or you can reach my research advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent.

For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: ***Critical Narrative of Multiracial Women's Personal Journey: Negotiating the Intersectionality of Race and Gender Issues in a Monoracial Paradigm***

Principal Investigator: Geralda Silva Nelson

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Delores Liston

College of Education,

Curriculum, Foundations, & Reading

P. O. Box 08144 - Statesboro – GA

listond@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

Phone: 912 - 478-1551

_____ _____

Participant Signature **Date**

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed

_____ _____

Investigator Signature **Date**