A Studio-based Self-study of my Perceptions about my Mixed
(black and white) Identity

Antoinette Koranteng

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By: Antoinette Koranteng

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Signed by the final examining committee:

          Linda Szabad-Smyth   Chair

          Kathleen Vaughan   Examiner

          Lorrie Blair   Examiner

          Linda Szabad-Smyth   Supervisor

Approved by _____

                    Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

                    _____

                    Dean of Faculty

Date   _____

ABSTRACT

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My studio-based inquiry critically examines my perceptions regarding aspects of my mixed black and white identity. My artwork was informed by a systematic practice of journaling, sketching, photo-documentation, and reflection. I examined the racialized categories that I identify with and that others use to identify me. I made links with critical reflection on concepts related to race related literature, and looked at the work of other artists dealing with similar themes and materials to mine. In the process of using different materials to make the artwork, I gained insight regarding how racialized categories – "black," "white," "bi-racial," "multiracial" – may function to perpetuate negative stereotyping, mainly through fixed conceptions of identity and misconceptions about scientific notions of race. The purpose of my thesis is to maintain dialogue on race-related issues, especially at a time in our society when people sometimes believe that such things are a thing of the past and that one's skin colour no longer matters like it used to. My reflections about my mixed identity, as detailed through my art-making, show that problems concerning race and the concepts associated with them still need to be critically examined. Applied in a multicultural art education context, a critical approach in teaching and learning should involve, or continue to involve students' reflections on their own experiences in their work, as well as others, through inclusion of a diverse range of artists that reflect the contributions of many, rather than a select few, in the fine arts.

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DEDICATION

In memory of my mother Luba

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction & Question

"Race is just about the trickiest topic to write about with any measure of objectivity, and only brave men or fools should try. Anyone who wants to walk the minefield of race should invest in a thick skin with chameleon-like pigment...Because the trouble with race is that there are black and white and a kaleidoscope of shades in between." (Wiwa, 2001, p.1)

Out of curiosity, it is not uncommon for complete strangers, or people that I hardly know, to approach me in order to find out where I was born. Alternately, the colour of my skin has also elicited responses from the same kinds of people but in more negative ways. More to the point, I have been a victim of racism. The latter includes being called a "nigger" in a derogatory tone when I was young, and most recently by a student. I have also encountered other incidences of racial name calling (sometimes written on walls) at my school from students, though not many. During the years in between, racist attitudes directed towards me have been less blatant but noticeable. I might also mention that a few of my colleagues who have dark skin have also recently been targets of racist behavior. This is all to say that my skin colour, or my blackness matters (including other people who are like myself), often to people I hardly know, and in undesirable ways.

In recounting some of my experiences, it is clear that the common identification people have of me is "black," regardless that I am also "white." This puts me in the same category as all visible minorities of colour that are labeled this way. We all bear a similarity based solely on the colour of our skin that often, unfortunately, typifies us in negative ways. Despite the fact that it is the 21st century, negative stereotypes continue to exist and are continually being circulated through North American society though less harshly than half a decade ago. In terms of how I describe my identity, it is in close relation to how others perceive me, which often involves using current and accepted terminology, whether I agree with them or not.

The truth is, at a very deep core of my being I do not feel that I am black, even though I often describe myself in this way and others label me as such. I also do not feel white because others do not perceive me this way, though at times I have felt more affinity with being white because I grew up in a predominantly white community. Regardless, I could simply say that I am black *and* white but these terms are so abstract that they carry little meaning for me as clear indicators of how I see myself. In this way, I am left with trying to better understand what these two categories mean, in terms of how I perceive myself and how others perceive me, as a woman of mixed African and Ukrainian/Canadian ancestry.

As a result of my upbringing and shifting perceptions of myself, together with assumptions that people often make concerning my background and where they think I am from, I feel a disconnect between *how I look* – black - and *how 'I feel* – neither black nor white but something in-between both ways of being. I have never felt fully connected with my white or black cultural backgrounds, though more with the former because of my upbringing, as I mentioned earlier. However in a physical sense, I often identify myself as "black" because of the colour of my skin. In the more recent past I have also used the term "biracial" and "multiracial" to describe myself, and "visible minority" only when filling out official documents that required me to do so. Though it is often reported that these racialized categories reflect social definitions of race rather than biological, anthropological, or genetic, I have never felt comfortable describing myself as biracial or multiracial.

I do not like using the first term biracial because it suggests that a person is part of two separate races, which conjures up outdated and invalid notions of biological race. I have used the term because other people who are mixed like myself use it and because it is a popular term used in the media, books, and scholarly texts. When I started using the term multiracial, another current and popular category that generally refers to people having two or more ethnicities like myself, it seemed a better fit. I am not quite sure why, it may be that I associated it with the word "multicultural," a word I use and find inoffensive? Though I often still interchange the two categories when describing my mixed identity. Regardless, the fact is that the multiracial term makes the same reference to race as biracial does, only more so

(Spencer, 2011, 2006). I began to question these particular racialized categories that apply to me more in-depth through the process of working on my artwork in the master's program, as well as doing the research for this thesis.

<u>The Question</u>

My thesis is on identity and issues related to my mixed ethnic background and being a woman with brown skin colour. As a result of my skin tone, my research aims to examine what it means to be a mixture of both "black" and "white" ancestries in North America in the 21st century, together with the racialized labels associated with this way of being. Since I have not been spared racist remarks because of my skin colour, I am interested in deconstructing the variety of categories I may assume, which allow the latter to happen, and more broadly, perpetuate racism in the education system and society at large. As such, my thesis explores my identity in relation to my construction of meaning in an art-making context, in an attempt to make clearer negative meanings embedded within racialized concepts that do not look like they will be out of circulation for a long time.

A while back, I recall a sculpture that I did in a studio class in the master's program that had significantly influenced my decision to move in the direction of my mixed identity (see Figures 1 to 3). The theme of the sculpture explored some of my perceptions concerning my mixed ethnic background and lived experiences regarding aspects of my blackness and whiteness. As part of my conception for this piece, I welded spoons together in the shape of my head using a plaster cast mold I had made as a guide. The spoons had photographic images of my friends and family transferred onto them, as well as newspaper articles about racially motivated events that had occurred in the United States and South Africa in the past 70 years. From a distance it looked like a metal skeletal structure, while up close there were images and text on the spoons, as well as a mirror-like reflection they created as one looked into them. For me, the piece was about my perceptions, reflections, and memories of my past, and some of the people and events that helped to inform a sense of my

mixed ethnic background and myself. During the process of making the sculpture, mostly in the metal shop at Concordia University, and after its completion, the feedback I got was very positive and I was personally very happy with it as well. The progression I made as a result of this artwork propelled me to want to make more artwork concerning my mixed ethnicity as part of an arts-based thesis.

Figure. 1.
Antoinette Koranteng, (2010) *Spoon sculpture* for master's studio course. Photograph by Antoinette Koranteng

Figure. 2.
Antoinette Koranteng, (2010) *Spoon sculpture* [side view] for master's studio course. Photograph by Antoinette Koranteng

Figure. 3.
Antoinette Koranteng, (2010) *Spoon sculpture*
[detail] for master's studio course. Photograph
by Antoinette Koranteng

As I continued to reflect more deeply on my identity, certain issues arose that I wanted to address in my research related to how I perceive myself and how others perceive me. Regarding the former, as a woman of mixed ethnicity with brown skin colour born and raised in Canada, I have named myself with many different racialized descriptors such as: mulatto; half-caste, half black and half white; half and half; from one white parent and one black; black; visible minority; biracial; and multiracial. Though I have used all of these racialized categories to label myself at one time, I have mainly identified with them in a negative way, meaning that I have often generalized my perceptions of my blackness as being inferior to my whiteness. It is also true that I describe myself as "black" and never "white" despite the ancestral fact that I am also part of the latter. However, it was an enlightening moment when I realized many years ago that I did not identify with either of these categories but with something much more indeterminate, that

perhaps does not need to be named. And if it does, I simply saw myself as a human being, or a woman with brown skin colour.

In terms of other people's perceptions of me, for many years I had often wondered about my situation being a Canadian citizen, yet frequently being perceived by others as not. I came to realize that this notion of identity was not as clear-cut as I once thought, especially as I reflected on its application to my own sense of self and my background. For example, other people's perceptions of me revealed themselves when they would ask me what my nationality or place of birth was, often thinking that I was an immigrant from a Caribbean, African, or South American country, despite the fact that I am a 2nd generation born Canadian. Other social perceptions include official government reports, such as the Canada Census that describe people with my skin colour as visible minorities. The description is meant to signify a person or group who visibly are not part of the majority racial group, which often makes me feel like I am "less than" the norm because my skin colour is brown. Using the word "visible" can be misleading because it suggests that being white is the standard by which everyone else must be measured (Woolley, 2013).

Also related to others' perceptions of me is the issue of racism and racist attitudes, which I have been a victim of directly and indirectly. Through being labeled as "black" and because of my skin colour, I have sometimes been a target for negative racial slurs. So, in looking at all of these concerns in relation to my own experiences, the difference between how I perceive myself, compared to how others perceive me, is wide. These differing perceptions have led me in wanting to explore aspects of my mixed-ethnicity through the process of art-making. As such, my research question asks: How is meaning constructed in my art-making through practice-led research that explores my perceptions concerning my mixed ethnicity and skin colour in relation to racialized categories that I am labeled with?

My studio-based inquiry takes a critical theory position as I explore and challenge traditional categories and concepts of race that are currently used in North America, which label me as a person of colour and are embedded with negative stereotypes. Through my use of materials in my art-making together with

theory, I focus on deconstructing the concepts of blackness and whiteness, the terms visible minority (more commonly used in Canada) and multiracial identity (more widely used in the United States but increasingly in Canada) in order to disrupt how I may easily be classified with them. I pay particular attention to the work of critical multiracial identity theorist Spencer (2011), the sociologists Bonilla-Silva (2010), Fleras (2012), Lipsitz (2006), Miles and Torres (2007), art critic Lippard (1990), and author and social activist hooks (1981, 1995) whose arguments I support, as their general beliefs are that these concepts perpetuate invalid ideas of race, which lead to acts of discrimination and racism within society. More broadly, my investigation helped me to gain insight and give voice to my own personal concerns related to my mixed identity in a social climate that is currently heated and divided on the topic of race-related issues. As such, my studio-based practice is informed by arts-based research and is an entry point into art education. As in many areas of learning, in art education there is a need to deconstruct master narratives through whatever form(s) chosen (image, text, sound, etc.), in order to demystify negative cultural stereotypes about different groups of people, whether they are labeled as black, white, multiracial, Asian, Arab, Jew, and so forth. In this sense, my inquiry follows what Barone (2008) calls "socially committed research" that aims to ask necessary questions and generate dialogue rather than give fixed meanings to race-related cultural phenomena (p. 39).

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Literature on identity

 Race/Racialize

In my research I draw from a number of scholars from the fields of Sociology, Critical Mixed Race Studies, Art Criticism, and Feminist theory. The latter include, Fleras (2012), Miles and Torres (2007), Spencer (1999, 2006, 2011), Andersen (2003), Davis (1991), Lucy Lippard (1990), and bell hooks (1981, 1995), and others who critically examine racialized concepts as symbols that perpetuate hierarchies of oppression in society. Some of these authors point out the notion of historical evolution as a classification system used to categorize groups of people according to their physical similarities, in order to assess their legitimacy in a contemporary context (Davis, 1991; Fleras, 2012; Miles and Torres, 2007; Spencer, 1999, 2011). Their findings suggest that though racialized categories may have changed at different time periods, generally their overall effect has remained the same. The latter includes marking people as different and essentializing them, situating them in unequal economic playing fields, and typecasting them in negative ways, which often leads to racist behavior (Fleras, 2012; Miles and Torres, 2007; Spencer, 1999, 2011). From an art context, Lippard (1990) explains the act of identification as a cultural naming process, which operates in three ways both visually and in text. The first way includes: "self-naming," or how we choose to define our self and others in our community; the second is a "neutral label imposed from outside," which may function "implicitly" and in more biased and damaging ways; and the third is "explicit racist namecalling," whose powers of misrepresentation may last for centuries, if not longer (p. 19). Due to the fact that I am product of one white and one black parent born in the mid 1960's in Canada, I am a part of this continuing evolution, pattern, or social construction, in which I am identified according to a variety of racialized descriptors. The different descriptors of black, biracial,

multiracial, or visible minority have four things in common: 1) they all fall under a broader conception of race as a *process of racialization* (Fleras, 2012; Miles & Torres, 2007); 2) they support the myth of biological or scientific race (Fleras, 2012; Miles & Torres, 2007; Spencer, 1999, 2006, 2011,); 3) they refuse to question the "pure" status of whiteness (Fleras, 2012; Spencer, 1999, 2006, 2011); 4) they perpetuate negative stereotyping (Spencer, 1999, 2006, 2011); Miles & Torres, 2007; Fleras, 2012).

Though the notion of race is no longer accepted as valid among many in the scientific community as something that occurs naturally at the biological level, Fleras (2012) and Miles and Torres (2007) argue that differences in skin colour are still strong markers in contemporary society that demarcate racial difference. Currently, as Fleras (2012), Spencer (1999, 2006, 2011), and Miles and Torres (2007) put forth, a widely accepted definition of race now places an emphasis on social construction. This describes race as an idea rather than something that can be measured and fixed, which further allows for its demystification. Still, with this new shift in thinking, the authors maintain that many academics in the field of Social Sciences still promote the idea of race as a biological fact. Spencer (2006) argues, "it is not race that is a social reality, but rather *belief* in race that is a social reality. The difference is fundamental" (p. 39). Similarly, Fleras (2012) maintains that "race may not be real, but its perception and consequences are… even when largely unfounded by empirical evidence" and even if it "is a socially constructed perception, it is a powerful perception that impacts profoundly on social reality" (p. 34). Miles and Torres (2007) support Spencer and Fleras' (2102) position by explaining that

> …one of the contemporary challenges in the analysis of racisms is to develop a conceptual vocabulary that explicitly acknowledges that people use the idea of 'race' in the everyday world while simultaneously refusing to use the idea of 'race' as an analytical *concept* when social scientists analyze the discourses and practices of the everyday world. (p. 71)

My research supports the latter position through my discussion and examination of the term 'race' and my intention to make it more widely understood

as a concept or abstract term whose strength has rested upon worn out beliefs about it. Also, my aim is to show how it gets maintained through the continual circulation of different racialized categories, often daily, in society. As such, it is important that academics, the media, and the government – including schools - do not help to feed misinformation about race- related ideas to the wider public through various source material, frequently understood to be based on truths, and therefore a reflection of reality and what it is and how it is meant to be lived.

In order to untangle the many categories that I am labelled with and how through them I am sometimes targeted in unfavourable ways based solely on my skin colour, in my research I use Fleras' (2012) term *racialize* or *racialization* to better understand how the descriptors work. The latter word places an emphasis on a person or group who impose their own racial beliefs on others for purposes of discrimination because of ignorance and/or for purposes of power and authority. So, if I am marked as different through being called "black," "biracial," or "multiracial" by others, and if these particular names act as gateways to calling me other offensive terms like "nigger" that are intended to make me out to be inferior in some way or another based purely on the colour of my skin, then they are racialized conceptions of me. Fleras (2012) makes one more important distinction between the terms *racialized* versus the concept of *race relations*, which is another contemporary usage of the idea of race. For example, Doane's (2003) description of the latter concept characterizes it as "social relationships between groups having unequal levels of power" (p. 9). Fleras (2012), on the other hand, maintains

> ...there is no such thing as race relations in the sense of a 'race' of people who stand in a relationship to another 'race' but there are relationships that have been infused with race overtones ('racialized') by those with power.
> (p. 45)

The latter notion is fundamental throughout my studio-based research beginning with my own need to better understand misconceptions of race that I have believed on some level for over half of my life. Appalling as I find the latter to be, my examination of all the categories I am called allows me to situate notions of race not

as things in themselves, as I once did, but as something done to me, even if I do it to my self.

White/Whiteness

Next, I turn to the racialized category "white" that I am *not* labeled with as a person of mixed ancestry, even though one of my parents was Ukrainian Canadian. Instead, I am labeled "black" because one of my parents was African. So, my difficulty with the concept white as a descriptor is because it works in opposition to my being considered black and operates as a kind of tool to reinforce all that is negative about it. Though these labels may intend or appear to be "neutral" in the naming process of and by people in everyday language, negative racial stereotyping is often perpetuated (Lippard, 1990). As the notion of whiteness can exist only in relation to the concept blackness, it often works silently but strongly. From a sociological perspective, Fleras (2012) explains a function of the racialized binary as the entitlement accorded to white people versus the lack of the same kind of advantages given to black people. Similarly, in her discussion of the concept whiteness, Andersen (2003) maintains that it is "based on *a system of privilege*, mapped on to the domination of 'others' – that is, people of color" (p. 24). In terms of my experience, in the absence of my being perceived by others as "white," most obviously in a physical sense, the perception of my "blackness," or my brown body, always takes the foreground with added significance. As a result, *both* concepts have more to do with the colour of my skin and nothing at all to do with my personal attributes as a human being.

hooks (1981) sees white advantage played out by "the dominant race that can make it seem that their experience is representative" and "reserves for itself the luxury of dismissing racial identity while the oppressed race is made daily aware of their racial identity" (p. 138). Similarly, Andersen (2003) defines whiteness as "*ubiquitous*, though typically not acknowledged" whereby "just as people of color have been 'racialized,' so have whites, although with radically different consequences" (p. 24). Within an art context, Lippard (1990) regards these divisions

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and ways of naming as reflecting a "cultural pride" that has "survived generations of social undermining" (p. 20). This struggle may have made it "easier to think of all Americans moving toward whiteness and the ultimate shelter of the Judeo-Christian umbrella than to acknowledge the true diversity of this society" (p. 20). Lipsitz (2006) sees diversity being undermined by whiteness, or a process "protecting the privileges of whites by denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility" (p. viii). The author stresses whiteness to be more related to attitudes linked to interests, and less about direct contemptuous feelings towards others, which "non-white people" may also participate in actively or passively in its hierarchies and rewards" (p. viii).

In being part white ancestrally but in the absence of being called white by people in society there is that gray area, or the attempt to mix the two concepts white and black together to create new categories, such as biracial or multiracial, to define people like myself. What is intended with the new classifications is for people to be able to self-identify with their different ethnicities if they choose, rather than being labeled with only one, as was done in the past. Through my inquiry and in support of Spencer (1999, 2006, 2011), I agree that regardless of the new labels, just below their surface remains the notion of whiteness, which stays "white," as well as the idea of blackness that remains "black." The biracial and multiracial categories coined within the past 30 years or so, are founded upon a racialized ideology based on biological conceptions of race (Spencer, 1999, 2006, 2011).

Black/Blackness

As a person with brown skin colour I am often called "black" and perceived this way, in what otherwise may be called "neutral" terms (Lippard, 1990, p.20). I have no problem with this other than the fact that the term is heavily loaded with negative connotations, which are sometimes projected on to me and do not relate to how I perceive myself in any way as a human being. For example, in the past I remember being followed around a department store by an undercover employee because I was perceived as being a possible thief. This may not be a black

phenomena but I remember wondering if the colour of my skin had anything to do with the incident. Many times I have internalized negative ideas about being black and have thought myself inferior to others. The latter is a result of my blackness and negative attitudes of some towards people of colour, racial slurs directed at me, as well as stories from friends and relatives who have told me about their negative racial experiences. I have also felt inferior because I believed in the conception of race and an associated hierarchy whereby there was a higher human worth in being lighter in skin colour than darker. My main reason for believing this was pure ignorance either from personal experience, other people's experiences, the media, and my education, which characterized people with darker skin colour in negative and inferior ways. Lippard (1990) explains that with the act of naming, a person often "must battle the self-loathing created by the larger society, not to mention suspicion and prejudice between cultural groups" (p. 20).

In looking at the term black from a historical perspective in North America, its negative associations become more apparent through its links to slavery and the former labels given to people of colour during and after that period. For example, in Canada and the United States during the 18th and 19th centuries a black person was called "Negro" meaning someone who was a slave or a descendent of one from an African population (Davis, 1991, p. 6; Henry, 2010, p. 38). After slavery was abolished in the mid 19th century in North America, the latter term was interchanged or replaced with "coloureds," "mulatto," "un-mixed blacks" (having no white ancestry), and "non-whites" (Davis, 1991, p. 6; Henry, 2010, p. 113; Synnott & Howes, 1994, p. 13). This lasted up until the mid 20th century for about 100 years. Then, more specifically in Canada, in 1970's, the "visible minority" category replaced the latter terms (Synnott & Howes, 1994, p.1). In the 21st century, Canadian legislation and scholarly publications still use the racialized term "visible minority" to describe blacks and other non-white groups of people (Statistics Canada, 2011). Outside of the government, other contemporary Canadian terms include "people of colour," "black Canadians," "African Canadians" and "racialized minorities" (Fleras, 2012, p. 61-67). On the other hand, in the United States during the decades of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950's and 1960's the term "black" came into being as

a category, or rather, was revived from the 1920's Harlem Renaissance, reflecting the growing pride and political power among African Americans (Davis, 1991, p. 74). By the late 1960's people in black communities south of the border began identifying as "Black American" and "Afro-American," and then later, interchanging or replacing the terms with "African American" to express a sense of cultural unity based on their African and American roots (Davis, 1991, p. 74; Gubar, 1997, p. 41).

New contemporary categories that express identity for a great majority of North Americans who have African ancestry has still been cause for great debate in the 21st century where some who are native born African American argue that black immigrants should not be using the term because they were born elsewhere. Through all of its transformations, the classification "black" accorded to people with brown skin colour seems to have been a positive development from its earlier days of highly segregated communities, public lynchings, and human slaves who were treated like cattle. Though, for the same reasons, because of the history of slavery in both Canada and the United States, negative perceptions concerning people of colour continue to exist. Whether it was because of slave related dealings that treated people as objects to be bought and sold, or through language meant to signify them as "non-white," the clear message was of absence or lack of: being white or being human.

To make matters worse, negative perceptions related to people classified as black were further confounded through scientific theories supporting false biological notions of race. As such, it is easy to understand how negative ideas about black people became rooted in the North American psyche and unfortunately, still are. In the 21st century, these negative perceptions of blacks and dark-skinned racialized minorities have translated into areas of their social lives. The latter includes, as Bonilla-Silva (2010) states, the fact that racialized blacks "are about three times more likely to be poor than whites, earn about 40 percent less than whites, and have about an eighth of the net worth that whites have" (p. 2). Also included in these statistics is the inferior education blacks get in comparison to whites even if they attend integrated schools, the value of their housing property is one third less, they have less access to the housing market through practices of

exclusion by white homeowners and realtors, and are targets of racial profiling by the police and the judicial system (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

In looking at the category black in a contemporary context, Spencer (2011) positions the idea of blackness against the notion of "purity" associated with the idea of being white (p. 123). It stands to reason that if the notion white or whiteness is meant to symbolize a sense of purity then being black or the idea blackness, at its opposite end, would denote "impurity" (Spencer, 2011, p. 123). To give a real life context to these abstract notions, take for instance the racial slur "nigger" that I was called by a student that was white. In the student's attempt to put me down and make me feel inferior I was offended but I stood up for myself and responded with "Excuse me?" challenging the individual to repeat what was just said to me. The student responded back to me with "I said negro." After more words were exchanged between us including my questioning why use the word "negro," I sent the student to the office because it was obvious that this was about playing games with me and showing a total lack of respect. This was not the first time we had had unpleasant exchanges but the student had never called me a racial name before (or at least one that I had heard). Some months later, after this situation happened to me, another racial based incident happened that was in the news, which students in my class were all talking about. The latter concerned a well-known owner of a basketball team who made a racial remark against black people and then later resigned due to a lot of outside pressure. Both of these racially motivated situations, however different, have at their core, an idea of blackness that is tainted, or what Fleras (2012) calls "a highly visible stigma (or marked category) that denies, excludes, or exploits" (p. 51).

Visible Minority/Racialized Minority

In Canada, another racialized category that is used to define who I am as a person with brown skin colour, sometimes in the form of politically correct usage in daily language but more often, in my experience, as written or reported information in government documents, is the term "visible minority." Synnott and Howes (1994)

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define the latter "as persons who are non-white in colour or non-Caucasian in race, other than aboriginal people" (p. 1). As mentioned earlier, by the 1970's the term "visible minority" had replaced the older categories "non-whites" and "coloureds," in an attempt to minimize the negative connotations implied in the latter (Synnott & Howes, 1994 p. 1). The new phrase was also part of "equity legislation and affirmative action to promote minorities and the marginalized" from disadvantages they experienced in areas of employment and income, as compared to the majority white population (Synnott & Howes, 1994, p. 27). The term "visible minority" is still currently used in Canadian legislation to represent all people who are non-white (Statistics Canada, 2011). As my research question critically examines the term "visible minority" as a descriptor that is used to define me, I support Fleras' (2012) use of the term "*racialized* minority" (p. 45) as an alternative because of its implication that someone else (whether a person, group, scholarly publication, media, or government source) is imposing their racial interpretation onto me, even if I do not see myself in the same way. I also want to point out that the term "racial minority" sounds similar to the latter category but its meaning is very different. Fleras warns against using the term because as a concept it creates the false idea that people belong to a group (race) that are unchanging and have always existed. I have been a victim of these kinds of fictitious beliefs in allowing myself to be called a "visible minority" without questioning the term more critically.

Biracial/Multiracial

I have vague memories of when I was young and I called myself a "half-cast" and "mulatto" and understood that the terms meant someone who was part black and white but I knew little about their racialized history. Later in my teens and 20's I used different terms to describe myself such as, "half-and-half," or "half white and half black," and other variations. Lippard (1990) calls the latter "self-naming," or how we choose to define our self and others in our community, which is the first way (of three) of how naming is used as a cultural marker (p. 19). Looking back, I do not ever recall feeling that it was a problem naming myself in these ways. I

remember hearing my mother use the word mulatto, while the other terms were most probably made up, as slang words often are. Since I came from a mixed background I just thought it was normal to have hyphenated names. Then later, sometime in my 30's, I started to label myself as "biracial" and "multiracial." The latter are the most recent racialized categories to describe people of mixed ancestry and started to be commonly used in everyday language in the U.S. in the 1980's. Da Costa (2007) states that the term "multiracial" was meant to replace the more offensive term "mulatto" used to define a person who had both white and black ancestry (p. 7). According to Root (1996) the terms biracial and multiracial both mean the same thing and include people who come from two or more racial backgrounds. It was only later in my 40's while doing my master's degree that I began to question the two categories more critically and, as a result, I became more aware of their implicated meaning with respect to negative stereotyping in relation to my mixed identity. This in turn led me to question my past beliefs regarding my identity, which I have currently unearthed in my thesis inquiry.

One thing I have discovered in defining myself as biracial or multiracial is that it really is no different than calling myself a "mulatto." As the latter term was replaced with black, African American, and African Canadian in the 1960's, its history goes further back to the 17th century in the United States during slavery. To call someone a mulatto four hundred years ago usually meant that they were the product of a white indentured servant and a free, or black slave. The mixing of whites and blacks existed in a number of other variations as well, including between white plantation owners and their slaves. In later years, as Davis (1991) explains, when mulatto offspring became free of bondage they were still considered to be black and loathed in the same way. In the decades before and after slavery in the mid-1800's, in North America, the racialized term mulatto was witness to a series of legal battles in order to define what the social and legal definition of "black" was (Davis, 1991). The latter struggle happened in part, as a result of the mulatto, whose alliances shifted with and between whites and blacks, sometimes acting with them and accepted by them, and at other times not (Davis, 1991). In the early 1900's, in most parts of the United States, the implementation of the "one-drop rule," meaning

that anyone who had "a single drop of black blood" was identified as being black," helped to define North Americans' perceptions about blackness, as well as perpetuating false notions of scientific racism (Davis, 1991, p. 5). In reflecting on the term "mulatto" and its varied history, I see how it has resembled my own confusion and "mixed alliances" within myself, in relation to my perceptions regarding my ideas of what it has meant to be both black and white.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the racialized term "mulatto" would be swept into the popular imagination through its connection with the literary conception of the "tragic mulatto" character in popular novels, as well as the marginal man theory espoused by scholars in Sociology (Spencer, 2011, p. 35). Originating in American literature the tragic mulatto was a stereotypical fictional character of white and black ancestry who was perpetually conflicted internally because he/she could not fit fully into either sides of their background. In his book *The Marginal Man,* Stonequest (1937) described the mulatto (as well as other racialized or cultural hybrid type persons) as going through a series of life-cycles in which they could come to terms, in varying degrees, with the tensions they experienced in their personal and divergent social worlds. At best, the author believed that because of the mixed person's particular struggles, and in the wake of a future career choice they could potentially make towards trying to resolve some of the racial and/or cultural conflicts in society, they were especially endowed to do so. Whether the latter is true may be another research topic, but I agree with Spencer's (2011) view that if the mulatto can move us beyond racial thinking, it is only through a complete rejection of it or, as he says "by committing racial suicide" (p. 314). To make a shift that allows for a new kind of thinking that leaves behind old racialized notions involves a number of strategies, two of which include rejecting the terms biracial and multiracial (Spencer, 2011). In terms of the story of the conflicted tragic mulatto and the fact that it was something I believed about myself in varying degrees, at different times of my life, it echoes Spencer's view on the fate of multiracial ideology as being permanently flawed.

I return back to my earlier point that calling myself "multiracial" and "mulatto" is not much different despite the claims that the latter is more offensive

than the former. Both classifications signify a person having white and black ancestries. Though the term multiracial is more inclusive today and may include a number of mixtures including someone who is of Latino and American descent, Chinese and American, or in my case, Canadian/Ukrainian and African, I refer to it only in the latter narrow sense, in relation to my own black/white identity. The "multiracial" category was initiated in the 1980's by the parents of black/white children (usually the white mother) who wanted a new racial identification for them (Spencer, 2011). Historically, the mulatto term has been in circulation for much longer and in the past it implied two very different beliefs, as mentioned earlier: one involved the notion that the mixed person could not rectify their two separate identities; the other included the idea that because of their specific racialized positioning between being black and white, they had the opportunity to help unite the two opposing sides. Spencer (2011) argues that the latter ideas are presently alive in the beliefs of those who promote multiracial ideology, or those who think that they are racially different than blacks, and therefore do not use the category.

In terms of the doomed tragic mulatto story where the individual is stuck in two separate and unyielding worlds, it echoes the ideology of the multiracial stance that to be multi-racial means that one is *not* mono-racial, or "pure" black, or a black African, or supposedly unmixed racially (genetically) (Spencer, 2011). Though the multiracial has identified with both their mixed ancestries they deny it in others who in many cases are mixed but their skin colour may be darker, so they perceive them as black only. So, the tragic mulatto personality who is forever scarred because of their divided ancestry is similar to the fiction of the multiracial that cannot see the forest for the trees, so to speak. Though the latter thinks they have come to some kind of unification and acceptance of their unique identity, they have done it at the expense of rejecting the North American black who, in most cases, is also of mixed ancestry. Both are in fact one and the same. The idea of the hopeless mulatto who is at odds with him/herself is similar to the multiracial who instead of internalizing their grief has externalized it and projected it onto others in an attempt to separate from "blacks" (Spencer, 2011). Overall, both notions are misleading and based on the myth of biological or scientific race.

In a similar vein, the belief in the past that because of the racialized mulatto's positioning in-between whiteness and blackness, they could help rectify the two opposing sides, echoes some beliefs that multiracial proponents hold today. For example, Spencer (2011) maintains that currently in North America there is the perception among many people that the country has entered a post-racial era, especially as Barack Obama, a mixed race president now leads the United States (even though he identifies as black and African American). The latter notion is related to the popular belief that multiracial people represent a "buffer race" that will help move the nation beyond racial strife, which Spencer argues against (p. 150). Similarly, but with a different outcome, Bonilla-Silva (2010) predicts that most multiracials in the United States will become part of a "triracial stratification system" that will include them as an intermediate racialized buffer group called "Honorary Whites," also comprised of light skinned Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, and Asian Indians, among others (p. 179). Some multiracials with very light skin will rise to the top of Bonilla-Silva's three-part hierarchical order as "Whites," which will include "'traditional' whites," "new 'white' immigrants" (Russians, Albanians, etc.), Assimilated white Latinos," and others (p. 179-180). "Blacks" who subsequently no longer make up the largest minority group in the U.S. (Latin Americans do) will remain at the bottom with others including "Dark-skinned Latinos," "New West-Indian and African immigrants," as well as others, as the "Collective Black" (Bonilla-Silva, p. 180). Bonilla-Silva's model of a new racialized social system maintains "whiteness" at the top, or white supremacy, whereby exclusion of those who are furthest away from this ideal is favourable. Whether one identifies as multiracial at the top, or in the middle of Bonilla-Silva's model and believing that they can act as a mediator between members of the white and black community, have a similar fate as the tragic mulatto. As the perception was that the latter lived in a permanent state of racial divisiveness, the former can only create the same because they refuse to believe their ancestral connections with their black kin at the bottom of the hierarchy (Spencer, 2006, 2011).

So, in calling myself "multiracial" like I have many times, without knowing it I have supported the fiction of race. I have also done the same by identifying as

"black." As Spencer (2006, 2011) clearly maintains, native blacks from North America generally are of mixed ancestry from birth due to population mixing, so whether one is called black or multiracial is no different. Through my initial problem with the terms, I have come to realize how associations are easily made and I find this disturbing. Embedded within categories like biracial and multiracial, which are accepted and used everyday in our society, are racial overtones that serve to maintain perceived divisions between notions of whiteness and blackness, and there being fixed entities. As such, my research supports claims put forth by Miles and Torres (2007), Fleras (2012), and Spencer (2006, 2011), about how easy it is to assign meanings to one's identity even though this might perpetuate racial stereotypes, and sustain scientific notions of race that were discredited decades ago. In the same way, my inquiry reflects the beliefs of the latter scholars who, in one-way or another, argue that "the modern state is a racial and racialized state," whether it be Canada or the United States, mainly because "Human societies are socially created constructions" that reflect the "interests of the dominant sector" (Fleras, 2012, p. 53).

Other artists' works

Artists who have used similar themes concerning identity and race, as well as materials, such as clothing and pills, inform my art-making. The latter includes artworks by Adrian Piper, Magdalena Campos Pons, Lorna Simpson, Yinka Shonibare, Derick Melander, Damien Hirst, and General Idea. In terms of the clothing materials that make up a large part of my work, I also make links with modern social theory on fashion

Much of Piper's artwork includes performances and installations that deal with her mixed black/white identity and the perceptions of others regarding her racialized background. Piper's video installation called *Cornered* (see Figure 4) really resonated with my research. I had seen it years ago but was revisiting it again. In the latter she is shown on a television screen talking behind an overturned table with chairs behind it for viewers to sit in. Above Piper are two copies of her father's

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birth certificate, one indicating that he is black and the other octoroon (one-eighth black). The latter is fitting as Piper can pass as white but she lets the viewers know that she is black and then goes on to say she is caught in a racial dilemma, not of her own making. Cited in Bowles (2011), Piper tells her viewers that identifying as black upsets the whites, and identifying as white upsets her own humanity, as she has to listen to the racial comments they make about blacks. Piper is able to make viewers reflect on their own racialized perceptions of her as "black," as well as "white," through her ability to pass as such. As a result, she challenges viewers to confront their assumptions about what being black or white means in a racialized body that must constantly endure disgrace either way (Bowles, 2011).

Similar to Piper's work, my artwork examines my mixed black/white identity, as well as others' perceptions about it, while questioning notions of whiteness and blackness and the negative stereotypes embedded within them. However, in *Cornered*, (see Figure 4) Piper frames her work around the notion of "passing" as white and her refusal to do so, while identifying as black (Bowles, 2011). The latter is a result of her resentment of an American social system that pressured black people to pass as white, in order to gain privileges denied to blacks, especially pre-1960's in many segregated American cities. More specifically, her father had passed as white enlisting in the Second World War in order to fight in combat rather than take a menial position if he had identified as black (otherwise he always identified as black) (Bowles, 2011). Other relatives in Piper's family had also passed as white at different times in their lives to gain opportunities they would not have gotten had they disclosed that they were black (Bowles, 2011). On the other hand, my artwork questions the notion of whiteness and blackness by focusing on the racialized categories I am labeled with and does not make any reference to "passing," as this was not part of my experience, or that of my relatives.

Figure. 4.
Piper, Adrian (1988). *Cornered.* Cited in Bowles (2011) *Adrian Piper*,
p. 9.

The Cuban-American artist Magdalena Campos-Pons is another artist that I
draw from in my research because a lot of her work incorporates her mixed
ancestry, which includes ancestral ties to Africa. The artist is known for her
paintings, performance, and installations, and it is one of her latter artworks that
drew me to her, which I saw parallels to my own artwork. For example, in Campos-
Pons' installation *Sugar/Bittersweet* (see Figures 5 to 7) she uses materials such as
African spears that pierce different coloured discs made of raw sugar and glass
(white, light brown, brown, and dark molasses), stacked on top of African stools
located all over a room, to address her own mixed identity and her family's ties to
the slave-based sugar industry in Cuba. The piece also evokes the wider African
slave trade that enabled this type of economy to thrive (Orlando & Cypess, 2014). In
terms of my research, I am particularly interested in the artist's use of different
coloured sugars and glass that suggest skin tone variations, in association with an
existing social hierarchy in Cuba. The latter includes her use of white or refined
sugar as a metaphor for those at the top of a racialized hierarchical system, then a
light brown glass, a brown sugar, and a dark molasses, to suggest a rank and order

below those at the top. In my work I also use similar coloured materials (white and different shades of brown) though I use different kinds of found materials, as a way to suggest racialized categories, which are linked to a wider social and racialized hierarchy in North America.

Figure 5.
Campos-Pons, M. M (2010) *Sugar/Bittersweet.* [Installation]. Photograph by Stephen Petegorsky. Courtesy of Smith College Museum of Art.

Figure 6.
Campos-Pons, M. M (2010) *Sugar/Bittersweet.*
[Installation/detail]. Cited in Campos-Pons,
Muehlig & de la Fuente (2010) *Sugar: Maria
Magdalena Campos-Pons*, p. 8.

Figure 7.
Campos-Pons, M. M (2010)
Sugar/Bittersweet.
[Installation/detail].
Photograph by Stephen
Petegorsky. Courtesy of
Smith College Museum of Art.

My art-making is informed by the work of Lorna Simpson, an African
American artist who works with photography and text, video, and film, and whose
themes include gender, identity, culture, history, and memory (Jones, Golden & Iles,
2002). I was particularly interested in Simpson's photo-textual work and her ability
to generate a variety of meanings related to identity through them, in a poetic way.
In *You're Fine* (see Figure 8) there is an image of a reclining female figure with dark
skin turned away from the viewer in four separate but connecting photo panels. The
figure wears a light white cotton dress and is lying on a white surface and the wall
behind her is also white. Different text are laid around the photos concerning
medical tests (physical exam, blood test, etc.), a secretarial position, and the words
"you're fine" and "you're hired." The work produces a variety of readings, including
ideas related to the racialized black female body as an object to be inspected and
controlled through medical testing, as was done in the 19th century during slavery to
determine their value as high producing labourers (Jones, et al., 2002). As Simpson's
figure has her back turned to the viewer, it forces us to look at her with different
eyes, or beyond what we think we see (Jones, et al., 2002). As hook (1995) notes,

Simpson's black reclining figure is framed within a medical context, which attempts to define her from a subordinate position. However, the artist is able to disrupt the latter by showing a figure at ease, despite an assault on her racialized black body, challenging the "domination and oppression which would confine and contain it" (hooks, 1995, p. 99).

In looking at Simpson's work I saw thematic similarities to my own artwork, especially the way the artist questions the notion of blackness, or the black racialized body, through negative stereotyping, in relation to a larger social context. Though, in *You're Fine*, the artist uses a photograph of a human figure and text to simultaneously deconstruct and construct ways of seeing the black human body, as a sight of empowerment versus subjugation. In my artwork, I use clothing and other found objects as a means to reflect on my feelings and experiences, in relation to racialized labels I am identified with, to uncover their embedded meanings. In reading about some of Simpson's intentions for her work overall, I was interested in the fact that what we the viewer may see as a "black" body, or parts of it, in her work, her goal was not to represent them that way (as black), so much as it was to make us question *why* we view it that way (Jones, et al., 2002). Generally, I am fascinated with how her work makes us question our own beliefs about identity, race, history, and so forth, much like Piper's does.

Figure 8.
Simpson, Lorna (1988) *You're Fine.* Cited in Jones, Golden & Iles (2002) *Lorna Simpson*, p. 33.

My art-making is also informed by the work of a few other artists who use, or have used similar types of materials to construct their artwork, such as clothing and pills. Also, in using fabric, I make links with literature on fashion, as it relates to the body .

Yinka Shonibare, a British-born Nigerian artist and Derick Melander, an American artist, have both used clothing as part of their studio process. Shonibare deals with themes related to race and colonialism, and Melander with individual and collective identity (Melander, 2014; Sollins, 2009). In Shonibare's installations, he uses headless wax figures positioned to look like they are engaged in various activities (e.g. in conversation, sexual acts, violent acts, etc.), while dressed in colourful fabrics typically worn in Nigeria. The artist points out the origins of the clothing, as having been produced for an Indonesian market by the Dutch in the late 19th century but because it was not popular there, they found a new market for it in West Africa (Sollins, 2009). In talking about his headless figures, I found it interesting how Shonibare describes them as "mixed race" and "neither white nor black," and without "any facial features that identify them racially" (Sollins, 2009, p. 210). For the artist, the latter technique positions his work as post-racial, as in his installations we imagine the actors engaging in different activities without specific reference to their identity (Sollins, 2009). For example, in *Scramble for Africa* (2003) a group of headless men sit around a table that has a map of Africa painted on it actively engaged in a meeting to decide how the country will be divided among them (Sollins, 2009, p. 211). The piece was based on a European conference held in Berlin in 1884-85 to determine colonial boundaries on the continent, which Africans were not consulted on (Sollins, 2009). In reference to Shonibare's description of his figures as "mixed race," (p. 210) this suggests the notion of race as a biological reality, which is a major criticism I discussed earlier and talk more about later in my study (Sollins, 2009).

Melander is another artist who uses fabric in his work. The artist carefully folds and then stacks second-hand clothing, creating large geometric figures out of them. In *The Painful Spectacle of Finding Oneself* (2010-11) the artist compressed neatly folded clothing and layered each article according to their colours to create

square columns six feet high and one foot in width and depth (Melander, 2014, Works section). Melander (2014) describes his process of working with single pieces of clothing that transform into one large mass as symbolic of the individual and society, and the interplay between the two. Though Melander's work is completely different in form and content to my artwork, I see some similarities in his process of searching for colour combinations with his fabrics, as well as the act of folding and layering them.

In creating a metaphor for my black/white identity through clothing in my artwork, links can be made with modern social theory on fashion. Meaning in my work is manufactured through careful placement of coloured clothing, divided in sections on my canvas, suggesting an absence of real bodies. In imagining the people who once may have worn the garments, and are no longer present, what remains is their clothing or outerwear. In discussing fashion's relationship to identity, Entwistle (2000) describes the latter as a sight of tension whereby clothing both reveals one's identity and conceals it. These "two contradictory tendencies" (p. 139) of fashion can be likened to my own art-making where I use clothing to work out my problems of connection and disconnection with my mixed black and white identities (Entwistle, 2000). For example, in being labeled "black" because of my brown skin colour but not really feeling black "inside," or in a cultural sense, this creates a sense of tension. This is especially so when the latter results in negative stereotyping and racist namecalling.

Entwistle suggests (2000) that the notion of revealing one's identity through fashion came about as an outcome of early formations of European city centers in the 1800's and peoples' responses to anonymity within them. As such, appearance became important, and two strategies were used to deal with it. The first involved what Entwistle (2000) states, as a search for a person's "true" (p. 121) character through appearance, which was seen as emanating from within, or as natural and authentic, exemplified by the Romantic style "to be an expressive individual" (p. 113). The second strategy involved a "desire for artifice and play with appearance, through fashion and disguise," (p. 113) as typified by the dandy style and "a concern for individual distinction" (Entwistle, 2000). The author suggests that these two

themes – "artifice and authenticity" (p. 113) - have extended into contemporary culture shaping the way we understand identity, though less as means to distinguish class. The author gives examples of 20th century versions of the Romantic and dandy styles, the former "the hippies of the 1960's and 1970's " (p. 133) and the latter, the glam and punk rockers of the 1970's (Entwistle, 2000). By the 1950's western culture began to experience a "democratization of fashion" (p. 134) through mass production in the clothing industry, allowing the growing middle-class to become consumers of style (Entwistle, 2000). Clothing worn by youth subcultures also developed into particular styles and fashion trends, as alluded to earlier (e.g. punks, skinheads, etc.) (Entwistle, 2000). By the 1980's the poor and middle-class could dress like the rich, through the purchase of imitation designer labels at affordable prices (Entwistle, 2000). In this way, clothing in contemporary culture became a vehicle, in which notions of the self, or one's identity could be explored across class and various subcultures (Entwistle, 2000).

In terms of my own artwork, I see parallels with Entwistle's (2000) discussion about appearance and its links with identity and fashion. For instance, in examining my black and white identities in my work, I carry the assumption that there is a unique, or individual self to look at. The latter relates to Entwistle's (2000) first strategy of dealing with appearance through a search for one's "real" or "authentic" (p. 132) self through fashion. In my work I use clothing as a metaphor for different aspects of myself. The latter includes black garments to represent my blackness, brown and beige clothes to signify my biracial or multiracial self, and white and cream coloured fabrics to symbolize my whiteness (or its absence). As well, I chose mainly feminine type clothing and medium in size, as is my build. The latter was done intuitively, as I did not intentionally have this in mind when I started constructing my work. As such, in choosing these clothes, they act as a vehicle, in my search and/or expression of my mixed identities.

However, in another sense, the materials I use on my canvas suggests a connection with Entwistle's (2000) second strategy in dealing with appearance through "disguise" or "the self as constructed" or "performed and perfected through self-conscious use of dress and the body" (p. 113). For example, the clothing in my

artwork, which act as a kind of substitute for my absent body, or other absent bodies become containers, in which an interplay of tensions between my blackness and whiteness are acted out. In using very specific type of clothing - items fit for my consumption – I am able to explore and construct new ways of thinking about my mixed black/white identity. The latter include careful placement and positioning of coloured fabric on my canvas to express my personal feelings of disconnection with my black/white identity, the labels that fasten me to them (e.g. black, biracial, multiracial), and their by-products, which include negative stereotyping and racist behavior. In this way, I see parallels with my art-making and Entwistle's (2000) statement that "Fashion, dress, and consumption provide ways of dealing with the problems of the modern world, characterized by increasing fragmentation and a sense of chaos" (p. 139).

In terms of using pills as a type of material in my art-making, British artist Damien Hirst and the Canadian collective General Idea have also used pharmaceuticals in their work to examine themes related to life and death, myth and medicine, and illness (Hirst, 2014; Tone, 1996). In an installation called *In Search of Reality* (2007), Hirst constructed a pill cabinet with multiple shelves each containing different coloured pills, individually laid out, neatly in rows (Hirst, 2014). The pills are actually artificial and made of resin and plaster and then painted over, which the artist decided on doing after having tried using real ones and realizing that they would eventually decay (Hirst, 2014). Hirst's (2014) work questions the general reliance people have on medications and how science has become a new kind of religion. In using real pills (Ibuprofen) in my artwork I considered their shelf life, but constructing fake ones was not an option for me because I did not have the resources to do this. However, I like the authenticity the pills give to my artwork, which helps further their symbolism as a kind of social disease resulting from false notions of "race" that perpetuate negative stereotyping and racism.

General Idea, a group of three artists who were active from 1967 to 1994, also used pharmaceuticals in their work to deal with the AIDS epidemic. For example, in *One Day of AZT* (1991), the artists constructed five large human-size capsules laying on the floor, with 365 smaller versions of the pill, in sets of five, in

bas-relief along the walls (Tone, 1996). The title refers to AZT, or azidothymidine, the first antiviral drug made available to AIDS patients, and the daily dosage (5 capsules) needed to help treat it (Tone, 1996). The artists have constructed large-scale pills in which to reference a disease that has wide ranging implications on the individual (two members of General Idea died in 1994 to AIDS), their families, and on society in general (Tone, 1996). I am fascinated by the way the artists have created a large number of oversized pills in their work, which, in their arrangement, almost look like missiles ready for attack. In my artwork, I use hundreds of pills all over my canvas interspersed between clothing but their scale has not been changed. However, there is a similarity in General Idea's use of pills and my own, in that they both represent "disease," except that in *One Day of AZT* (1991) they are suggestive of a real and present physical illness, while in mine the implication of sickness is less tangible but nevertheless there.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

<u>Research Method</u>

      The research method I employed for my thesis involved a studio-based practice informed by arts-based and practice-led research. Proponents of the latter include Sullivan (2010), Smith and Dean (2009), Makela (2007), Eisner (2008), de Freitas (2002), Busch (2009), Borgdorff (2012), Barone (2008) and others who believe that a reflexive art practice is a legitimate form of research, on par with other research methods.

      In using a studio-based practice to critically examine different racialized categories I have identified with over the years, I use what de Freitas (2002) calls "active documentation," or the collecting of visual and textual data to develop my research (p. 1). The latter also involves a reflective component, or a reflective practice, which requires a critical engagement in the "conceptual, theoretical and practical" aspects of my studio work (p.1). As such, my working definition of studio-based research is summed up in Borgdorff's (2012) explanation of the primary role played by art practice in the service of research, stated as follows:

> Art practice qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes. Art research begins by addressing questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes. Research processes and outcomes are documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner to the research community and the wider public (p. 205).

      My studio-based practice is informed by arts-based research, defined by Eisner (2008) as a form of educational research "rooted in the arts" that uses "art forms to reveal the features that" matter "educationally" (p. 18). Elaborating on the

benefits of arts-based research, Barone (2008) qualifies it as an approach in which issues in education can be brought to light, knowledge broadened "because of *(and not despite)* the fact that it is profoundly aesthetic," and "one that *both* finds its inspiration in the arts *and* leads to progressive forms of social awareness" (p. 34). In my practice I have gathered pertinent and well-founded information in relation to my perceived racialized experiences from different sources. The latter includes literature that I have read related to race, and comparisons I have made to the work of other artists dealing with similar themes to my own. Looking at my personal identity and notions of race, my art practice functioned instrumentally as a way of understanding my experiences in and outside of the classroom related to discrimination and racism. Though my methodology may be understood as traditionally different, it has generated new insights concerning my identity within an educational context, as well as more personally.

In my research I also engaged in practice-led research, or what Smith and Dean (2009) define as creative work *combined with* creative practice. The authors maintain that both are a form of research but put emphasis on the creative practice component as important. According to Smith and Dean, to engage in creative practice means relying on "the training and specialized knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art" that can produce "specialized research insights which can then be generalized and written up as research" (p.5). In my inquiry creative practice has arisen from making an artwork whose process includes engaging in careful reflection and lengthy documentation. I developed my artwork in a systematic manner, which helped me to better understand race-related concepts more deeply, especially linked to perceptions regarding aspects of my mixed black/white identity. For example, I critically examined the racialized categories "black" and "white," which are both a part of my identity and linked to my experiences and beliefs regarding ideas about race. I also critically reflected on race related literature, especially concerning the "multiracial" label, and arguments against its use because of the belief that it perpetuates false notions of scientific or biological race. Combining these concepts with my experience, together with theory on multiracial ideology, I

manipulated materials as metaphor in my art-making to link them all together. As a result of making art in this way, as well as looking at the work of other artists dealing with similar themes to mine, I gleaned new insights regarding how racialized categories function to maintain negative stereotyping and race-related beliefs. In some arts-based literature a term called practice-based research is used to describe a similar kind of inquiry but is different than practice-led research. The former can be distinguished from the latter in that it is more narrowly defined to mean that the creative work alone forms the research (and not the practice leading up to it). In my investigation I use the term practice-led research to mean my artwork *and* practice together form the basis of my inquiry.

In terms of the creative work involved in my investigation, Busch (2009), an advocate of art as a legitimate knowledge form argues, "the work *is* the research" (p. 3.). The author maintains that studio production is often critically based in its examination of contemporary society and its social conditions. Evidence of this is found in my studio work, which is located within my own perceived racialized situation where I examine racialized concepts linked with my identity and racial experiences I have had in my place of work and elsewhere. Combining my art-making with creative practice, the latter is developed through systematic research and analyzed together with my final artwork in relation to my question. The final analysis results in a production of insights that are new in the sense that they contribute to an existing body of knowledge that according to Barone (2008) needs to challenge "the comfortable, familiar, dominant master narrative, not by proferring a new totalizing counter-narrative, but by luring an audience into an appreciation of an array of diverse, complex, nuanced images and partial, local portraits of human growth and possibility" (p. 39). In my research I aim to disrupt master narratives concerning racialized concepts as they relate to issues surrounding ideas of race in and out of the classroom, which often depict individuals in stereotypical ways that prohibit more accurate and human understanding of who they are.

With regards to the creative practice in my research, my training in art echoes artist researcher Makela's (2007) belief that knowledge can be generated

through the practice of making an artwork. In my practice I encountered different materials and manipulated them, while critically reflecting on my work both practically and theoretically, and discovered new ways of understanding and framing the racialized concepts I was working with more significantly. Consequently, the new material configurations I made towards the final completion of my artwork helped to support arguments developed in my exegesis, as well as contextualize my information. Overall, my studio-based inquiry could not have taken the form of research had I not had some prior experience as an artist, and been able to use my artwork as a method to gather "data," as well as have it on hand to reflect upon and analyze through its various transformations. Consequently, I developed a more critical stance towards my perceptions concerning racialized concepts linked with my identity in a social and personal context through my art-making.

In looking at studio- based research more broadly, Sullivan (2010) states that in universities in the 21st century it has grown in Europe, Australia, and less so in the United States and Canada. The author maintains that wherever this kind of research may be located, the studio setting is where it takes place, and creativity is not the only activity carried out in it, but also active intellectual investigation, which consequently produces knowledge that is "individually situated and socially and culturally relevant" (p. 70). In a small but significant way I contribute to this kind of research that draws heavily on creativity, while balancing it with theory related to themes of race and identity linked to my own experiences in and out of the classroom, as a woman of mixed ancestry.

Research Design

The data that I collected doing my research included journal entries looking at the self, sketches, photographs of work in progress, and my artwork.

In terms of using journaling in my research, Connelly and Clandinin (1998) describe it as a method in which educators may "weave together…accounts of the private and the professional, capturing fragments of experience in an attempt to sort

themselves out" (p. 166). I made journal entries before my art-making began in May 2012 and during or after most studio sessions from September 2012 to March 2014, whenever relevant thoughts and reflections occurred concerning my perceptions of being of mixed background, especially in relation to the categories I am labeled with such as black, multiracial, and so forth. More specifically, the content of my entries included thoughts and feelings linked with my racial-based experiences; my response to literature I read on mixed race; my response to the work of other artists; and ways to develop meaningful metaphors through the handling and placement of my materials on canvas. In this respect, the personal act of journaling about my mixed identity allowed me to reflect on my own experiences that I have had with racial discrimination. Van Manen (1977) maintains that journal writing "can be very helpful for keeping a record of insights gained, for discerning patterns of the work in progress, for reflecting on previous reflections" (p. 73). In writing about some older racial incidences in my journal, I only included more recent ones in my exegesis because I could not accurately remember details of situations that had happened to me when I was younger because of the long period of time that had passed.

In using a variety of methods to examine myself in relation to my inquiry, I was able to reflect on my perceptions about my racialized identity and experiences through different means. For example, sketching out ideas and making photographic documentation of my artwork helped me to visualize my theoretical concerns better in conjunction with the written component of my research, which fed into the construction of my artwork. More precisely, sketching ideas about my mixed identity, as a critical response to the racialized labels I am named with, enabled me to choose materials and arrange them symbolically in my artwork, linking objects to concepts related to my topic. The photographic documentation I made of my artwork as it was being built also facilitated it by allowing a more vivid reflection on what I had just completed, what I could change, and what I would keep.

The completed artwork allowed for an in-depth interpretation of my research question through insights I gained through my art-making process and looking at the work of other artists with similar themes to my own. I looked at ways

racialized categories work as currency in North American society, and hence the classroom, perpetuating negative stereotypes about individuals that often lead to racist attitudes and behavior towards them. I began to understand that what often appears as simple and straightforward ways of naming people (black, multiracial, etc.) are more complicated once they are examined more closely. Below their surface, labels can uncover a logic that functions socially, revealing the means by which false notions about scientific race, and domination of some groups over others, are kept buoyant. As such, LaBoskey (2004) supports using a variety of methods as part of the research process with the aim of bettering ourselves as much as our students. Corroborating the latter, the scholar maintains that it is important "Because we are as limited by our own personal histories and cultural identities as are our students, we cannot expand their horizons if we do not expand our own. Similarly, we cannot help them to detect and interrogate their biases if we do not detect and interrogate ours" (p. 840). In this way, the main purpose of creating artwork as part of my inquiry was to examine aspects of my mixed identity through the process of its construction and development of its meaning with the goal of critiquing master narratives. The latter included critically looking at the perpetuation of negative stereotyping through racialized naming such as "black," "mulitiracial," "biracial," "white," and so forth, as well as examining the work of artists using similar themes to my own.

Research Process

The data that I collected for this arts-based thesis included journal entries, notes, sketches, photographic documentation, and reflections. All of my data was collected from May 2012 to April 2014 over a period of 70 days, or approximately 371 working hours, as a result of my studio work.

My art-making sessions began in September 2012 working 5 hours a day during the weekends (because I worked full-time during the week) and during holidays 5 hours a day, 5 to 6 days a week. Five months prior to starting my artwork

in May, I began journaling to generate ideas. After finding some working ideas and beginning my art-making, I continued to journal between sessions and sometimes during them, up to the final completion of my artwork. In total I made approximately 47 journal entries. Some of the latter included writing down my personal thoughts and feelings concerning my mixed ancestry and other peoples' perceptions of me in this regard, as well as the categories I am labeled with such as black, multiracial, biracial, visible minority, and sometimes white. Other entries included my response to these categories in relation to race-related literature. I also wrote about the type of media I could use in my artwork, and how to manipulate these materials to create meaningful metaphoric references to all of my above concerns. I collected data in the form of notes related to the literature I researched on Critical Mixed Race, Sociology, and Creolization, and artists dealing with similar themes to my own. I also wrote about the technical aspects of building and designing my artwork , figuring out the materials I needed, how to position and reposition objects in terms of an intended design, how to adhere the materials onto my canvas, and finally how to hang the canvas on the wall.

Another source of data that I collected included 33 sketches I made to develop my artwork. I drew 26 sketches before generating an idea for my artwork and often in conjunction with journaling. The remaining 7 drawings were made during the making of my artwork, which helped me to make changes to make my work more meaningful.

I also collected over 400 photographs of my artwork during and/or after each session and labeled and filed them on my computer and USB key. I took close range shots to zoom in on details, which were included in my exegesis to better highlight my artwork from a closer vantage point. Other photos were taken from a greater distance helping me towards the construction of my work (e.g. deciding which materials to use or discard and where to place them, in terms of their symbolism in relation to my research question). In comparison to the number of photographs I took only a small sample was actually used to show my art-making process.

The reflection process was the last type of data that I collected, which involved systematically re-reading and reflecting on my journal entries and notes, as well as looking at sketches and photographs and then writing about them. The concepts generated during this process related to my perceptions concerning my racialized identity, my racial-based experiences, literature on mixed race that I read, and the work of other artists dealing with similar themes to my inquiry. Overall, the act of reflecting on all of my collected data allowed my art-making to move forward in terms of developing ideas and themes related to questions concerning my identity. This in turn contributed to the physicality of handling and placing a variety of materials (clothing and accessories, shoes, books, CD's, paintbrushes, paint tubes, etc.) on my canvas to create meaning.

CHAPTER 4: Planning

As noted earlier, the data I collected came from journaling and sketching for ideas, creating my artwork, photographing my art in progress, researching other artists, and reflecting on my experiences. As such, I have divided my art-making process into two stages: planning and constructing artwork. The planning stage comprises of my journal entries, pre-project reflections and sketches as I search for ideas for my artwork. The second stage includes the construction of my artwork, its photographic documentation, journal entries, and reflections. In both sections I use a different font for my journal entries and reflections for easier reading. I begin this chapter with the planning stage before starting my artwork.

Exploring ideas of blackness & whiteness

In the planning stage towards my art-making, I started exploring theories/ideas related to my mixed black/white identity, in order to unravel the tension I perceived being both. Making journal entries and notes about some of my experiences and thoughts being mixed helped me generate sketches for my artwork. I also looked at the artwork of other artists to see the kinds of work they had made in relation to themes I was using.

Early journal entries about ideas for my artwork:

May 2012.

Sculpture...find material that acts as good metaphor for being bi-racial ...newspaper clippings...black, white, brown coloured materials...my old clothing...all my old junk that I want to get rid of...use only colours mentioned above from it?
Do 2-d drawing possibly of my skeletal structure?...add 3-d pieces...along walls(?) and floor have some...objects embedded in it to suggest "archeological findings," "mine field"?

Some ideas I had included making an installation with used and found objects, as well as life size portrait drawings. I was interested in using old items from home that I didn't need any more and whose colours matched the general descriptors I was called (or not) – black, brown, and white. One vague idea I came up with was for my objects to represent findings, as if discovered from an archeological site, a kind of unearthing of my racialized self and related experiences. Or, the idea of my materials as being located in and/or a part of a minefield, a kind of dangerous place that has already erupted, or may at any moment.

Another entry with an idea for my work:

May 2012.
Use word "biracial" and dissect it in my artwork, through imagery and materials I use...take viewer on historical journey of its origins to present contemporary context?
try to 'de-racialize' the term, or describe it in ways to suggest that its not about a fixed idea of mixed race people, especially black and white but about cultural, social, and linguistic mixing, therefore many people are biracial or mixed race.

In terms of my mixed black/white identity, I thought about the "bi-racial" label I used to call myself and was intent on understanding more of its origins. I reflected on literature I had read in Cohen and Toninato (2010) about the term Creole, which they describe as a sociological and cultural definition. Though the Creole term is wide and debatable in meaning the authors provide some definitions. One early definition of the term that Cohen and Toninato (2010) give, describes it as an outcome of interactions between four groups of people: colonialist's who come to a new country; those born in the new country but whose parents are foreign born; the indigenous people of the country; and imported labourers to the country (who are usually slaves). The cultural intermingling of the above groups through language, religion, trade, politics, sex, and so forth, allowed for creolization, or the development of new group identities. In a more contemporary context, the authors agree that the term Creole may imply various aspects of an individual's identity

beyond their mixed heritage. For example, Cohen and Toninato (2010) acknowledge that though the term is often associated with the hereditary and cultural mixing of people, it often gets translated as a "racial category" based on skin colour, which they disagree with (p. 9). Rather, the authors argue that characteristics of Creole identity have a deep cultural significance that refer to people with *many* different types of skin colour who may engage in processes that are global in reach (e.g. through sharing of Creole language, Creole relationships, Creole popular culture, etc.).

Spitzer (2003) provides another description of Creole identity or creolization, which is more expansive and defined as "the development of new traditions, aesthetics and group identities out of combinations of formerly separate peoples and cultures – usually where at least one has been deterritorialized by emigration, enslavement, or exile..." (p. 58). The author refers to the definition in relation to the social identity of Creoles in Louisiana, which he maintains is linked "to the notion of a global society made up of many such 'small worlds' that are constantly creolizing from within and in relation to one another in local, regional, national, and global levels of proximity" (p. 58). Other Creoles outside of the United States include those from Mexico, Nicaragua, the Caribbean islands, Guyana, Sierra Leone, Liberial, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Malayasia, among others (Cohen & Toninato, 2010). Previous to my reading about the Creole term I had narrowly thought it referred only to an ethnic description of people from the Caribbean, or living in Louisiana in the United States who were a product of a specific population mixing (Africans mixed with French or Spanish?). After more refection on the literature about the term, and realizing I could not technically claim identification with Creole identity, I could still use it as a metaphor to form new conceptions of my identity. For example, comparing contemporary meanings of creolization, or Creole identity, to the "biracial" term, made the latter seem more limited and narrow. To be bi-racial implied an ethnic mixing of two different populations but did not include the wider cultural markers that applied to being a Creole. On the other hand, using Creole identity as a metaphor, in which to view my black/white identity, allowed me to

reconsider the biracial category I used that I found constrictive, as I was trying to probe further.

Another entry with more ideas:

May 12, 2012.
Idea = need to view race differently, from different vantage point? pieces can be parts of a whole drawing cut?

I made some roughly thought out sketches (see Figure 9 & 10) in search of finding images that would question my bi-racial identity and look at it differently. One sketch included a life-size portrait of myself cut up in long vertical strips placed in different areas and elevations on a wall extending to the floor and ceiling (see Figure 9). Other versions included the strips more uniformly placed next to each other with gaps in-between (see Figure 10). In terms of my art process, and visually, these cut-up portrait images acted as a way for me to begin unravelling notions of "purity" implied in the biracial category.
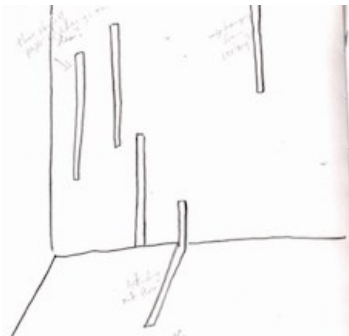
Figure 9.
Vertical strips #1, sketch
(May, 2012).
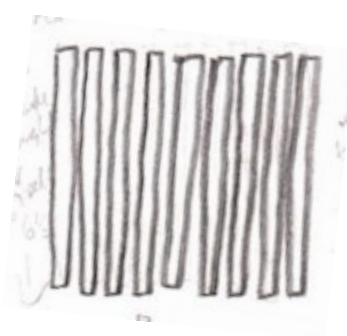
Figure 10.
Vertical strips #2, sketch
(May, 2012).

A journal entry with a new idea for my artwork:

May 13, 2012.
This morning I got an idea for my art project...project my face twice, facing each other...behind the projection will extend material that I will attach to a canvas and attach that to the studio wall...

Not happy with the idea of using portrait drawings in my work, I created new sketches incorporating some of the materials I had written about in earlier entries. In one sketch idea two profiles of my face (actual size) would be projected onto a wall facing each other (see Figure 11). The faces would show movement through breathing and blinking only on a canvas divided vertically in half with one side displaying white materials (clothing) and the other black, to symbolize my two racialized selves looking at each other. The idea was to convey sameness and difference simultaneously with my two facial profiles signifying the former and the different coloured materials behind them, the latter.
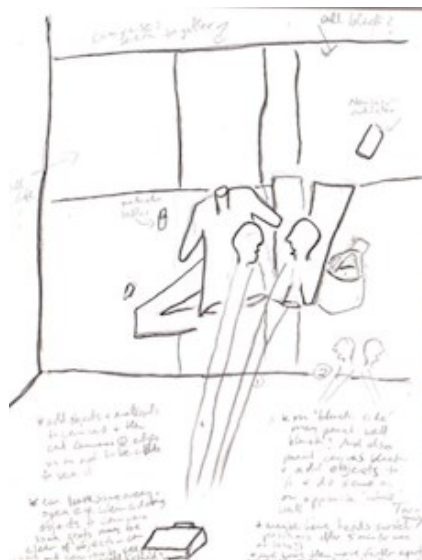
Figure 11.
Projection of faces on materials,
sketch (May, 2012).

After reflecting on the sketch I decided not to use the idea of digitally projecting my facial profiles onto a canvas but keep using the materials and the symbolism. I wanted my objects to metaphorically represent the perception I have of my mixed self as embodying "sameness," or being no different (biologically) than someone with white skin colour. I also wanted my materials to represent the perception of others that may see "difference" because of my brown skin colour. I just didn't know how I was going to do this with my items.

Journal entries about my thoughts concerning my mixed identity and its relationship to my artwork:

May 18, 2012.
What am I trying to convey:
The division of my 2 selves – black and white side...at same time their integration...a sense of my feelings of not quite feeling one or the other... just oscillating between the 2 constantly, or a blending...being in a mixed state...no fixed address, no fixed identity, first mainly white community that transformed to multicultural...division has a lot to do with my own lack of knowledge about my black and white sides of my family e.g. my Ukrainian and African sides...kind of mapping of these 2 sides of me that I'm partly familiar with on surface level but not in-depth...only things familiar are Canadian experiences on white side...feeling mostly white but looking black

Through journaling I struggled with finding the exact things I wanted to say in my artwork. The latter included my wanting to represent both sides of my ancestry and their division – the sense of my not feeling connected to either sides, as well as their integration – that I am a product of both, I am who I am.

Journal entries about representing aspects of my racialized identity through my artwork:

May 18, 2012.
Extend fabrics all across wall... it may "crawl" onto ceiling and floor and attaching walls...I may paint over fabrics (clothing, objects, etc.) in a subtle way to show that one side = white and other black...but need to find way that it's not so literal in colour...sew fabrics in way that it's not exactly half and half?
I feel white but look black...those in Africa see me as white and those who are full black over here also see me not as black black...use clothes

that are white only...To convey feeling of whiteness (too literal?)...use only black clothes...On white background?
I'm perceived as black so clothes could be black...people make assumptions based on my looks, my black appearance, my black skin colour...I can't change my skin colour... it's my clothing so to speak Some clothes on "white" side can be black... some clothes on "black" side can be white...clothes can overlap as I sew them together and/or glue onto canvas...use as much white and black clothing as can find...the rest of coloured clothing use as is...sprinkle this between 2 sides in and among black and white clothing and objects...maybe paint some "coloured" clothing white = metaphor for trying to be "white," to follow dominant group and master narrative (my past of what I did, how I felt, etc.)... *Make sure whole piece has variations of white to beige and blacks to browns to create feeling of multiple colours, yet a feeling of division

More journaling helped me to develop another set of rough sketch ideas. In generating them I still grappled with the multiple ways I perceived my identity and how to best represent them in my artwork. It felt like an experiential maze of perceptions and misperceptions in my feeling of being white in Canada but perceived as black and having been perceived as white in Ghana but feeling black there. My perceptions of feeling "white" during different parts of my life while growing up can be attributed to having tried to "be white." For example, I tried to conform to a "white" standard in the sense that I felt inferior being non-white because a few racial incidences made me doubt my worth. I generally thought that being "white" was better because a lot of the people I knew who had things I valued – a nice house, a friendly (and seemingly) functional family, a decent education, opportunities to travel, etc. - were white. Though I tried not to, I could only envision using my materials symbolically in very obvious ways like using black materials to represent my being perceived by others that way, and white to represent my feeling (or conforming) that way. Brown coloured materials represented a sort of joining of the other two colours, an aspect of my mixed self, to create cohesion within a division. For example, two sketches I made show a jagged vertical division and representation of my "black" and "white" sides to convey a notion of their being

separate entities but also integrated (see Figures 12 & 13). On the "white" side of my canvas I put some black clothing/items (and variations of black and some white ones). On the "black" side I put white clothing/items (and variations of white and some black ones). Also, some clothing would fold open to reveal its opposite tone, and if the fabric did not naturally provide this I would add paint.

Figure 12.
Jagged division #1, sketch (May, 2012).

Figure 13.
Jagged division #2, sketch (May, 2012).

While generating sketch ideas in the planning stages of my artwork, I also looked at other artists' works, particular black ones, to get a sense of what they had made on themes related to race and identity, like I was doing. Some of the latter included Betty and Alison Saar, Kara Walker, Adrian Piper, Lorna Simpson, William Pope O, El Anatsui, Fred Wilson, Michael Ray Charles, Renee Cox, Jean-Michel Basquiat (and later Magdalena Campos-Pons). In looking at some of their work, I was particularly conscious of not wanting to copy their style in my own. However, they all approached their artwork quite differently and I knew that what I needed to do was reflect deeply about my own thoughts and feelings concerning my mixed identity and trust that this would guide me in creating meaning that was significant in my art-making.

A journal entry with a new idea for my artwork:

June 17, 2012.
Evolution of art idea: stretch (stitch) canvas together to fit on studio wall...glue, stitch on items...one end will contain mostly "white" items (don't know if I will paint white objects that aren't white)...other end will have black items...white and black items will merge...with beige, etc

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My idea: I'm mapping my bi-racial identity, a kind of mapping of my life history through a black and white lens – or a bi-racial lens and using the things that I own and things that I've collected to convey this
*challenge is to do it in a subtle way
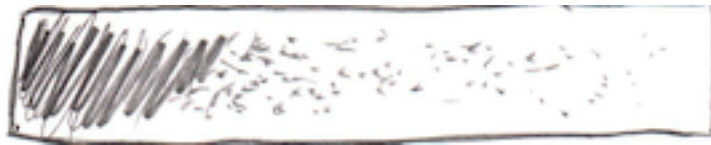
Figure 14.
 Merging of identities, sketch (June, 2012).

Not completely happy with my previous sketch I came up with another rough one that showed a different way of placing my materials, while keeping the same symbolism (see Figure 14). Instead of dividing my canvas in half as I did prior, the items would simply be spread across the canvas - black merging into brown and brown merging into white (or vice versa) representing the divided racialized aspects of my self, while still maintaining a sense of togetherness. Still, after reflecting on this sketch and the others I made, I abandoned them completely in the hope of generating better ones. About two months later, I came back to them (see Figure 12 & 13) and used some parts to develop other sketches.

Notes about new ideas concerning my biracial/multiracial identity:

July 17, 2012.
I want to question the concept of race, multiraciality, why people think they are multiracial and get across my belief that the idea of biological race is a false consciousness

In thinking of new ideas for my artwork I reflected a lot on multiracial literature I read, particularly on the argument that the multiracial label was based on an ideology whose principles assumed a belief in scientific or biological race,

whether one was aware of it or not (Spencer, 2006). I wanted to focus on exploring the "multiracial" category because I am considered multiracial and I call my self this more and more. I felt that I was actually replacing the "biracial" label with it. In reflecting on both of these labels further, I began to see what they *mean* and came to the conclusion that I didn't want to use them anymore. Identifying with the multiracial label meant that a person believed they were multi-*racial,* or a product of many *races*, which therefore implied a belief in the conception of race. I felt a heightened sense of awareness now about what the word "multiracial" implied, and a sense of foolishness. It seemed as if the most obvious assumption had lay before me part of my adult life and I had passed it by unaware. I needed to stop identifying with the multiracial label but I didn't think I could quit just like that – this is what I was exploring in my art-making.

The next set of sketches I made were very rough and different from the previous ones I had just made using jagged vertical divisions to represent my black/white identity. Instead, as I reflected on the labels I name my self with, especially "multiracial," which is a legitimate category on Canadian census forms, I got the idea of incorporating a multiple race questionnaire form into my artwork. The three sketches below show different ways of using a current government Census form by the U.S or Canadian government (since both offer multiple racial categories to choose from – 14 in the U.S. and 12 in Canada) and enlarging it, altering questions on it, and adding imagery to problematize traditional categories of race that label me in ways that are not clear and/or create racial stereotyping (see Figure 15). I did not know what kinds of images I would use at this point. The middle sketch was slightly different than the one below and above it in that the questionnaire was larger but would barely be visible and images would be overlaid on top (see figure 15, middle). The bottom sketch idea included an interactive art piece using magnetic letters that people could manipulate according to their answers to survey questions about their own racialized background (see Figure 15, bottom).
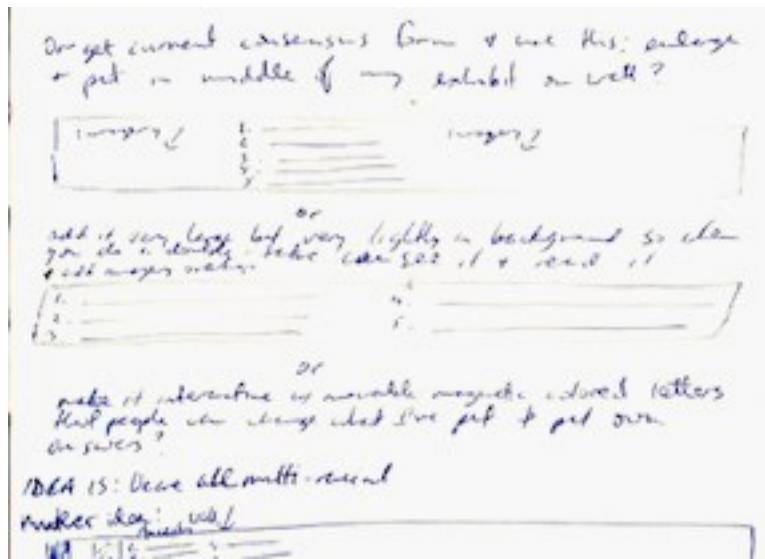
Figure 15.
Census questions (top, middle, bottom), sketches (July, 2012)

A journal entry about my multiracial identity and notes about how and where to incorporate census questions into my artwork:

July 17, 2012.
I and we all are multiracial, no such thing as race, multiracial identity will not confuse me...is a social construction
Black clothes at bottom but with census form questions printed in white on them...beige clothes with census questions printed in white and black...white clothes with census questions printed in black...make entire thing feel like 'air' the 'sky,' 'consciousness,' and get across idea of a false consciousness.

I drew more sketches that were very roughly thought out that still included the idea of a racial questionnaire in them but incorporated the older racialized term "mulatto," that I vaguely remember being called as a child. This term conveyed a notion of the Tragic Mulatto figure, or the fictionalized literary character struggling between two different social worlds at odds with each other, as a metaphor for my self, which I gleaned from Spencer (2006) and later in Stonequist (1937). In each of the small sketches I made I experimented with the placement of racial questions and a representation of a tragic mulatto symbol that was sometimes placed in the

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middle of the canvas, or elsewhere (see Figure 16). I liked the idea of using the Tragic Mulatto idea (Stonequist, 1937) as symbolism because it echoed the disconnection I felt between my whiteness and blackness and not fitting in with either sides and suggested binary opposites.
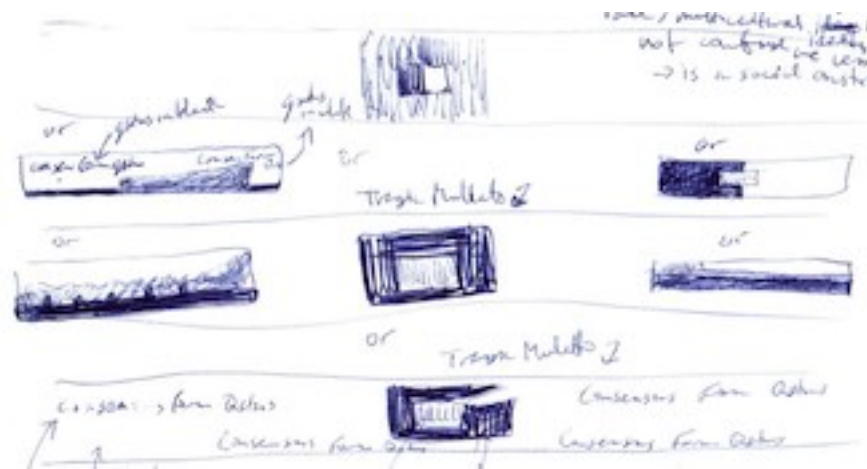
Figure 16.
Mulatto series, sketches (top, middle, bottom) (July, 2012).

After reflecting on all of the above sketches I decided not to use the tragic mulatto metaphor with its implication of uniting both sides of opposite races, or trying to, as it wasn't a truthful reflection of what I was aiming for because it spoke in limited binary terms. I decided to keep using the government Census form idea but incorporate it differently than I had been doing. I reworked sketch ideas (see Figure 12 & 13) I had made months earlier and experimented with placing materials in different sections on my canvas, while adding census questions over top. In one sketch I dispersed the tragic mulatto symbol I had used and replaced black coloured materials in the same area with white and brown materials on either sides (see Figure 17, top). In a second sketch (see Figure 17 bottom, left) I got the idea of layering materials in horizontal sections across my canvas according to the skin colours associated with my mixed ancestry – black, brown, and white. On each of these coloured sections I would add a census question though I wasn't sure what exact questions to use at this point.

In dividing my materials hierarchically, I started with a conception of my blackness and black experience and the negative stereotyping associated with it – like being called racist names like "nigger," which was really a put down. In this aestheticized, imagined and real hierarchy, I felt my black items belonged at the bottom of my canvas. In terms of my whiteness, it seemed directly opposite my blackness starting with how others labelled me - mainly as black and not white. Also, in my experiences working or living in different neighbourhoods in Ontario and Quebec throughout my life, I have mostly been viewed as the minority because there were very few people with my skin colour around, most were white. However, this was not always the case if I lived or worked in a poor community. I know what it's like to be different, to be the outsider, not "white." Even my "partial" whiteness has never counted in fitting into the "majority" because my blackness made sure of that. The white items belonged at the top of my canvas, opposite the black ones at the bottom. My brown items in the middle represented my mixed background. Using census questions still appealed to me - written in large letters across the clothing in each of the latter sections, in alternate shades than the clothing they were on.
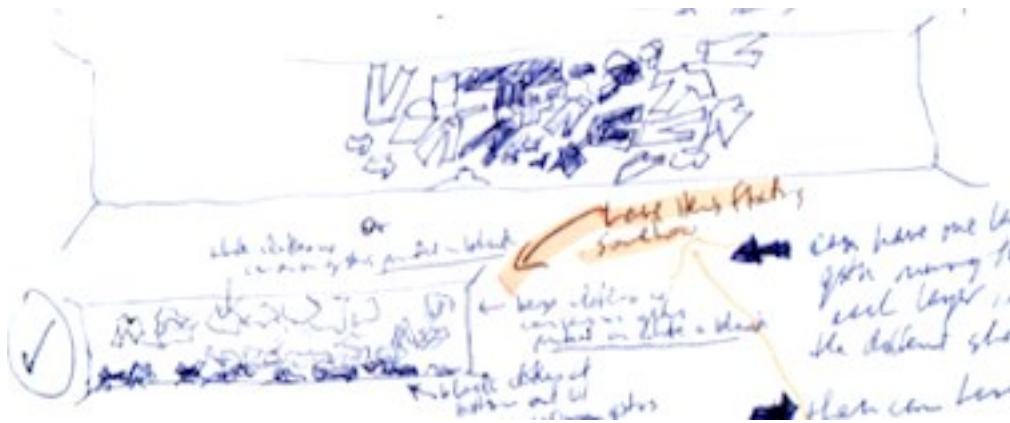
Figure 17.
Horizontal division of materials, sketches (top & bottom left) (July, 2012).

More journal entries and notes reflect different ideas I have for sketches I made towards my artwork:

July 17, 2012.
Another idea = notion of mixed peoples embedded with black identification and can't 'escape' black identification label
Or, should I reverse it according to my own experience and history? e.g. I grew up with white mother...in predominantly white neighbourhoods that were becoming mixed...But then when I was about 16 I felt that in terms of my blackness a sense that things were not as I had known them e.g. racist remark thrown at me, incident at job I had (may or may not have been because of my color?), being only person of color in mainly white places (getting stares)
Or, put it vertical?
Or, keep it horizontal with my experience and <u>research</u> and my new understanding and beliefs about notion of race = no race, all Africans are of mixed ancestry and notion of multiracial category does nothing to help alleviate problems stemming from hatred towards people of colour or from different ethnicities

September 16, 2012.
...all people who are visibly black, however light they are, are perceived as being black and categorized as such
- common idea is that they all come from the same 'race' – a 'black race' or <u>mono</u>-racial
- when in reality many have very different ethnic and ancestral origins
- or new notion that there are multi-races and we black people are multiracials, based on idea that one <u>mono</u>-racial parent together with one 'pure' white parent produces a multiracial child
*white parents purity never questioned and black parents mixed ancestry <u>never considered</u>
*both are of mixed race in reality
- artwork is about my being brown has me 'stuck' calling myself black, when technically I am also white though not ashamed of my 'blackness'

In generating sketch ideas for my artwork, I sometimes felt like I was closer to finding something relevant to my research concerns, while at other times I felt I was just repeating myself. My sketch ideas, like my notes and some journal entries, were all variations on themes related to aspects of my mixed identity. They included

mapping my racialized experiences with a focus on my blackness and whiteness and the negative aspects connected to the former. Also, I now had a new stance against using the multiracial label because I viewed it as a kind of trap that binds mixed black/white people to the illusion that they have lost their blackness. At the core of multiracial identity, or its ideology, was a belief in the myth of race, which perpetuates itself with its use. Though I had these ideas they resurfaced circularly, and often times confusingly throughout my art-making process. I got easily lost in all of the racialized descriptions that made up my identity and the related concepts, as I attempted to demystify them. However, in some odd way (what seemed like short moments of clarity) they provided me with some direction towards my artwork. This happened with my most recent set of sketches, which marked the beginning of a new trajectory.

I liked the sketch I made showing materials in horizontal rows stretched across my canvas (see Figure 17 bottom, left) and started to use it to generate others with. Even though it seemed too literal in its representation of parts of my racialized identity, I thought it visually easier to read than the previous sketch with materials clumped together in box-like shapes. In this way, I experimented with the next set of drawings and their placement of the different coloured sections sometimes putting one at the top, the middle, or bottom, and at other times interspersing them amongst each other (see Figure 18). I also continued playing around with the idea of racial Census questions trying to figure out where to best position them. I was not sure what the final size of my piece should be and if it should run horizontally along the wall or vertically, though most of my sketches were drawn with the former in mind.
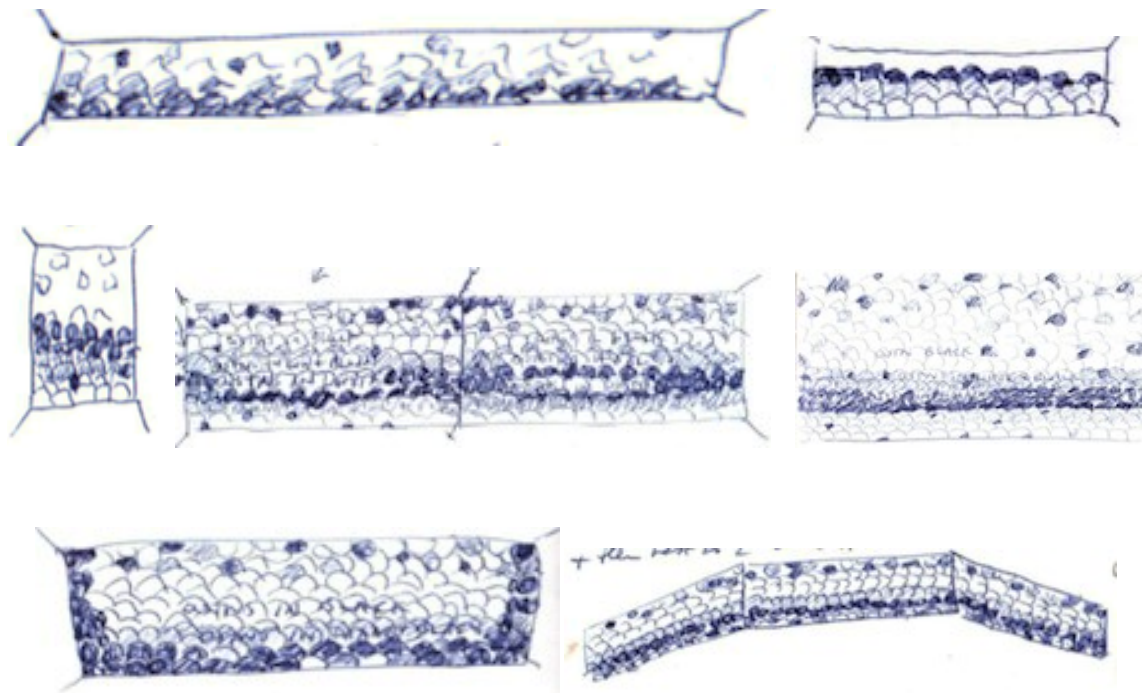
Figure 18.
Experimenting with horizontal divisions and census questions, sketches (July/August, 2012).

Journal entries about my thoughts regarding the negative aspects of being black and notes about multiracial ideology that I considered while making my next set of sketches (see Figure 19):

September 16, 2012.
- I just don't like the negative perceptions that are attached with being black e.g. I may be more prone to steal something in a store because the perception is that being black is equated to more likely being poor, or not morally good, so there's more chances I may be watched going into a department store, etc.
- e.g. I may not be perceived to be as smart as my white counterpart because the perception is that many blacks do not get a full education due to their being poor, involved in drugs, etc, so I may be seen to be less intelligent than my white friend
- e.g. I may get stared at a lot with my white boyfriend even though he is just as mixed as I am, but I'm visibly mixed

- e.g. in film and for black actors, its more common to see blacks in roles that convey stereotypes about them – as being the athlete, rap artist, gangster, prostitute, maid, etc. More roles that reflect what's happening in society have opened up to blacks but slowly
September 28, 2012.
Bottom third mostly black with browns and whites thrown in = all people who are visibly black considered "Black"…quarter in the middle will be "pure white" = represents my white side and ideas that white parents purity never questioned (while black parents mixed ancestry never considered)…rest of top = multi–colors of blacks, browns, whites
Maybe change proportions

In making the next set of sketches I abandoned the idea of using Census type questions and only experimented with different ways of laying down my materials horizontally (see Figure 19). By removing the text I felt my message could be conveyed in a more simple way and appear less cluttered. I also reflected more on my perceptions about my black experience and negative stereotyping. The latter included perceptions about black people: as being prone to rob or steal, while shopping, for example; as being less intelligent than white people; worthy of lesser roles in film and television that perpetuate racialized stereotyping. I also thought about some of my experiences traveling with my white partner in mainly white communities and being stared at a lot, which I attributed to our being a mixed couple and the fact that I have darker skin than him. I sometimes wondered if anyone ever thought of our difference in skin colour as mainly a surface quality that was not so important, especially considering the fact that he is as mixed as I am but not visibly. So, I wanted to convey these different elements of my racialized identity and experience into my sketches, especially a sense of division between people because of their skin colour but at the same time recognizing that they are not different biologically. The black materials would still symbolize my African Canadian side and my experiences being called "black," even though I was also 'white.' This was the beginning of the separation – my being called "black" but not 'white'- it was quite obvious to me now, this lack of recognition. The black materials would go at the bottom of my canvas. The white items in the middle represented my being the

product of a mother with white skin and also the idea of whiteness as "pure," an ideal to reach for, fixed and never changing, almost like it has existed for time immemorial. I cannot believe I accepted this idea of whiteness as true for a good part of my life! The brown at the top represented my mixed background and the notion of scientific or biological race as false, especially as perpetuated through the "multiracial" label. I started to feel like my work was going somewhere.
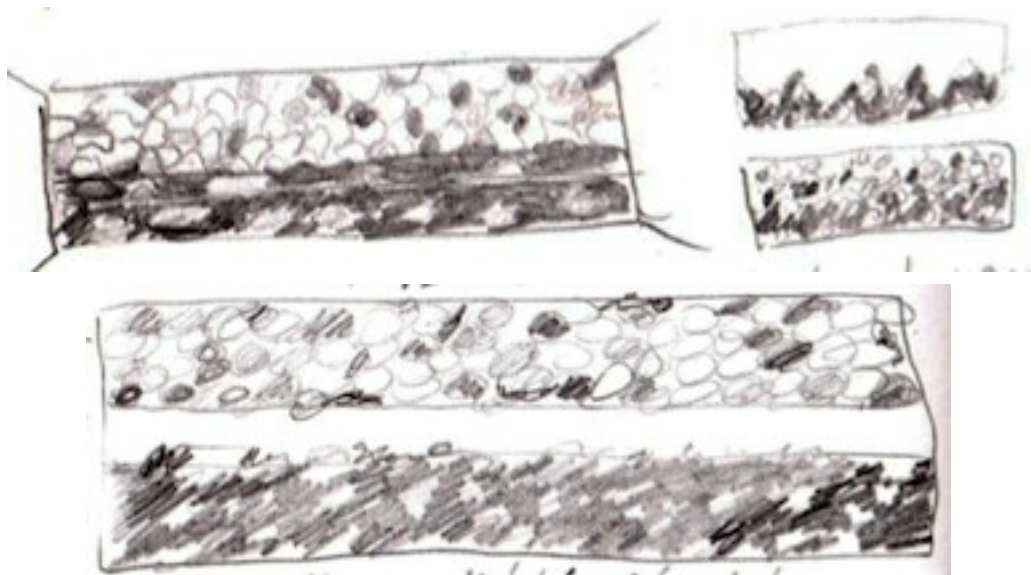
Figure 19.
Experimenting with horizontal divisions, sketches (top left, top right & bottom) (September 16, 2012).

I chose the above sketch (see Figure 19, bottom) to be my working copy to start my artwork with. In the meantime, there were a number of things I had to do before I could begin my art-making. I collected materials for my artwork from home and from friends, and purchased others from a second-hand clothing store. From the store I found clothing, jewellery, shoes, scarves, belts, handbags, a telephone, books, and CD's, and so forth. I also asked friends if they could donate old clothing, specifically black, white, and brown in colour, as well as medical supplies such as sterilized needles, pills, pill bottles, etc., (I had a friend who was a nurse that I could ask for some of these). I also purchased a large piece of canvas 8 x 16 feet and taped it onto my studio floor so I could glue material securely onto it. I made

measurements around the edges of the canvas so I could put grommets into it later for hanging. I also divided my canvas horizontally into 3 separate sections using a pencil to demarcate where to place the different coloured materials.

CHAPTER 5: Constructing Artwork

Constructing meaning with white, brown and black materials

The next stage of my art-making process involved constructing my artwork, as I had a working sketch idea, a lot of found materials, and a large piece of canvas with which to place them on. Using my sketch, I began to visualize my artwork vaguely, as a large canvas covered with materials and divided by their different colours into three separate sections. Each section represented ideas related to perceptions of my mixed black/white identity and experience. Some ideas included my use of black materials to symbolize my blackness, white materials to suggest aspects of my whiteness, and brown materials that pointed to my identification with and being identified as, multiracial or biracial. Conversely, the purpose of constructing these categories was to examine them more in-depth, in order to deconstruct them. As such, the art-making stage that follows includes a comprehensive reflection of the construction of my artwork, its photographic documentation, and journal entries. At this stage with a lot of my materials ready I began placing them onto my canvas. I divided them into four separate piles according to their colour – blacks, browns, beige and creams, and whites (see Figure 20 & 21). Some of the materials I used included jackets, shirts, pants, bras, jewellery, purses, wallets, CD's, paint brushes and tubes, make-up containers, pill bottles, and other items.

Figure 20.
Separating colours (September, 2012).

Figure 21.
Making piles (September, 2012).

By sorting out my materials I could see what I had to work with. It seemed simple enough but I knew it was going to get chaotic because this was part of my art-making process (which I didn't necessarily like). I had a lot of materials to work with and I needed to trim them down.

I used my last sketch idea (see Figure 19, bottom) and the symbolism mentioned earlier related to ideas of sameness (biologically people are not different regardless of their skin colour) and difference (because of differences in skin colour people are perceived as biologically different) and began dividing my materials into three different coloured sections (see Figure 22). Each of the sections stood as symbols of my racialized self – the black one, the mixed brown, or multiracial one, and the white one (by its absence). Manipulating my materials was not an easy process, it was messy. It was not paint or clay but it may as well have been. Starting with my black items, I juxtaposed them one at a time according to their colour, material type (e.g. leather, cotton nylon, etc.), texture (knitted wool, smooth silk, plastic, etc.), and patterns (e.g. flowery, stripes, solid colours, etc.) (see Figure 23).

Figure 22.
Dividing materials by colour - brown at top, white in middle, black at bottom (September, 2012).

Figure 23.
Juxtaposing materials (September, 2012).

Journal entries from the early stages of my art-making:

September 29, 2012.
I think I need to <u>layer</u> more...by folding each clothing item more...I want it to have the feel of <u>layers</u> like the different rock sediments.
White clothes fold very neatly??...to signify purity, not questioning it e.g. stays in place (nothing changes)

Black clothes fold (but not so neatly)?...signify not considering mixed ancestry...put browns & whites underneath black folds...signify hiding mixed ancestry
Mixed clothing at top mixed with neatly folded clothes & not neatly folded clothes...signify looseness happening in contemporary society regarding perceptions towards those of white, black & mixed ancestry with more realistic understanding that all are mixed no matter their color.

At this early stage of my art-making I reflected on ways to create a sense of layering with my materials but I was not quite sure how to do it. I also thought of using folded clothing in each coloured section as a metaphor for the way I viewed racialized difference among groups of people. The latter included those considered

"black" (African Canadians/African Americans) compared to people considered "biracial" or "multiracial" (African Canadians/African Americans) compared to those considered "white" (European Canadians/European Americans). Neatly folded white materials could represent the idea of whiteness as "pure," everlasting, and unproblematic. Loosely folded black clothing with layers of white and brown clothing in-between could represent the mixed ancestry of dark-skinned African Canadians or African Americans, which is often not recognized. This was the reason for the existence of other categories like bi-racial and multiracial, which did imply a mixing. Brown materials both neatly and loosely folded could represent the myth of racialized difference and where we are in the 21st century coming to terms with this reality. I thought about which ones to fold and if the final result of all of this would translate into the metaphors I wanted.

I found it hard using my rough 2-d sketch to manipulate 3-d items. I felt as if I was in a battle – me against a bunch of materials laid out onto a canvas with some ideas waiting to be mined for meaning – I was not sure I was up to it, but nevertheless I carried on. I continued reflecting on my possibilities of making an artwork, especially in relation to my mixed racialized identity and the fact that I was perceived as "black" but not "white," even though the colour of my mother's skin was white. I wanted to challenge the idea of blackness and whiteness and reveal them as social constructions; especially in the way the former idea was made real by the absence of the other. I was identified as black because other people perceived me as non-white, or not white. These concepts were just ideas and when you really thought about them they didn't mean anything beyond being the racialized classifiers they were. Even if I were also identified as white, it would still create the same problem of defining what it actually means to be "white" beyond being a racialized concept. I told my self that somehow I would translate these ideas into material form on my canvas.

Somewhere in this space of working I was not completely satisfied with the choice of divisions I had made for my different coloured materials. Since I felt more comfortable working from a sketch, even after having started my artwork, I felt I needed to make a new one to help me further. I made some new sketch ideas - three

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simpler versions of earlier ones I did (see Figure 24). The top and middle sketches were the same except for the different proportioning of their colours (black/bottom, white/middle, and brown/top). The bottom sketch was different in that I inverted the brown with the white, placing the latter at the top. One week later I decided to use the bottom sketch and started to rework the materials on my canvas according to its colour layout (see Figure 24, bottom).
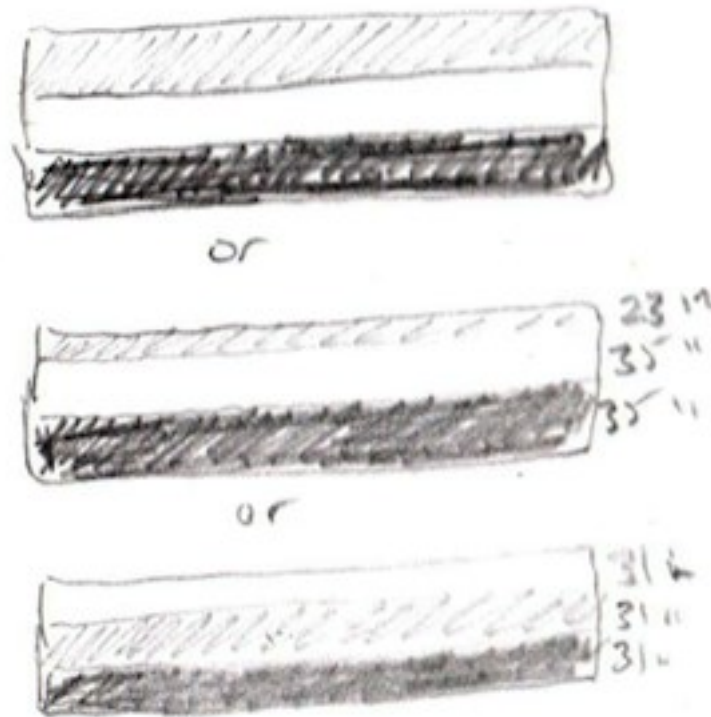
Figure 24.
 Changing horizontal divisions, sketches
 (top, middle & bottom) (October, 2012).

More journal entries from the early stages of my art-making:

July 17, 2012.
Layering of clothing...black on bottom layer = signifies idea of those who are mixed always identified as black (at base, encrusted at the bottom)...brown (mixed white and black) middle layer = in-between black at bottom and white at top, product of both...white at top = at top to signify position of whites on the societal hierarchy scale

There will be pieces of all above types of clothing and items interspersed throughout each of layers e.g. some white and brown in black layers, some black in white, etc. = to signify the notion that all peoples coming from
different ancestral backgrounds are mixed (include other different shades too)
Layering will be packed like layers of rock and sediment

Figure 25.
Changing division of materials – white at top, brown in middle,
black at bottom (October, 2012).

By changing the sequence of my colour-coded materials I hoped they would translate metaphorically into the idea of people ranked in society according to notions of biological race (see Figure 25). Though I was suggesting a racial hierarchy with my materials, it did not mean that I believed in the idea of race, or supported it. However, I did believe in the mythology of race when l was younger and that I, or others with darker skin, were more inferior to people with white skin. On some level I still think this way even while knowing it is not true. I think this way of thinking is partly because of the education I had, or lack of it, the influence of media images when I was younger, and my plain ignorance. I also think that a lot of people believe, in varying degrees, either consciously or subconsciously, that different races exist

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due to peoples' innate biological differences. The hierarchical positioning of my materials provided me with a way to examine the myth of difference, which I sometimes fell into the trap of believing, and more often witnessed all around me in society.

When I was young, I learned about the histories of different people in a minimal, or narrow sense. Stories were repetitive and seemingly one-sided, as I remember believing that what I learned was fact and this was how events had unfolded in history. For example, in learning about North American history and the First Nations People and that they had already been here before the white settlers had arrived, I did not understand that it mattered. What seemed important was the series of conquests the whites made thereafter and how they proceeded to develop the New World. In terms of the history of Africa and their people, I learned about Egypt and the tombs of the Pharaoh's, as well as some information about the Sub-Saharan African slave trade. I do not remember much about the latter from high school (I went to a few different schools). Later, in University, I took a course on African history and learned more about the complicated dealings of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which spurred me to read more books on the subject, which I did.

This is all to say that I think what my early years of learning provided me was a very one-dimensional view of a series of facts about different peoples' histories, or this is how I understood it. For example, in my mind it amounted to 'a' fought and/or traded with 'b' and 'b' lost (the war for land and/or profits – people, goods, etc.) or were decimated (though I do not think I was aware of the magnitude of what this meant in terms of real human lives). In North America, the people who were 'a' seemed to be mainly white Europeans and the people who were 'b' seemed to be predominantly non-white First Nations and African Americans (of course there were others – Asians, Jewish people, etc.). I don't remember understanding beyond this binary very much. Only later, did I understand that the 'b' people had many different stories of their own, and in telling them (and in the receiving of them) the awareness of one's own sense of history could be expanded to feel more full and complete.

In terms of media images I viewed, the roles black people played seemed to be subordinate to others around them, though this was changing with shows like the "The Jefferson's" and "The Cosby Show." The Cosby Show portrayed the African American family more prominently in middle and upper-middle class roles. Even though there were more decent roles being created for African Americans in television and movie productions, it seemed to be happening slowly. I still had seen enough shows as a child growing up in the 1970's to remember African Americans typecast into more limited roles. For example, blacks were generally the shoe-shine boys, the hired help, the pimps, prostitutes, prison inmates, or in historical fiction and documentaries – the slaves, the master's mistress, a victim of racial torture or murder, and so forth. Even though I was aware that most of what I saw was only acting, I was young, naïve and impressionable. I saw black people portrayed in subservient roles enough times that it worked subliminally in making me believe that generally, this was who they were. They rarely were anything else, and this is who they would always be. I was black too.

White materials/Whiteness

I liked the new division of colours – the hierarchy – they better resembled my dilemma – how to dispel the myth of race both within me and without, in the social environment I lived in. My perceptions of my racialized experience were my guide, as well as others' who had told me about their own experiences, and the artwork I had looked at made by black, or ethnically mixed artists, as well as literature I had read. There were so many positions with which to view my work and then provide a simultaneous view of the way I saw it. The question that still remained was could I design my materials in such a way as to have them represent a sense of racialized division, as well as the idea - and my belief - that it was a fiction and did not have to be that way?

I started folding the clothes in my white section and placing them in different positions (see Figure 26 & 27). I worked from the top white section of my canvas downwards, standing or sitting on my canvas moving items around.

Figure 26.
Folding white clothes #1 (October, 2012).

Figure 27.
Folding white clothes #2 (June, 2013).

One journal entry records my thoughts about a way to develop the top white area:

October 5, 2012.
In 'pure white' section I thought of folding in-between white clothes black clothes because no such thing as white purity"

Two photos below show an example of some brown and black clothing folded between layers of white clothing (see Figure 28 & 29). I felt that folding my clothes in this way would further develop the symbolism I had written about earlier (see journal entry: September 29, 2012) on essentialist notions of white/whiteness as "pure" and unchanging by subverting it.

Figure 28.
Folding brown in-between white
(October, 2012).

Figure 29.
Folding brown, beige and black in-between white
(March, 2013).

Excited with the idea of whiteness in a creative (and intellectual) way, I started to fold the white clothing very neatly, while only folding some of the coloured ones. For me, folding clothing suggested neatness, order, stability, and/or control, which reinforced the idea of whiteness I wanted to get across, especially in relation to the other non-white sections of my work. As I continued to manipulate my materials I wanted to push the fallacy of whiteness further, to suggest that like my mixed identity, it was a social construction, so I began to place some black clothes in-between some white ones. The latter also better conveyed the layering effect I wanted my piece to project. I experienced a joy in handling my materials because they too have contributed to the development. I felt my artwork was materializing into something at this stage. Manipulating items on my canvas and working with ideas were in sync and I saw the beginning of something starting to emerge from the messy piles of clothing. I felt a sense of happiness in this studio session because of the struggle I had made to get this far.

Another journal entry notes next steps to make in my art-making:

October 21, 2012.
Look at photos and think about next step in artwork… may be that I need to iron some clothes

Despite having some positive studio experiences, I felt a sense of being lost in the direction of my work in some way. My canvas was huge and I was only working on a small part and had no way of knowing if it was going to "work" as a whole. I realized I needed to reference the photos I had been taking but had not looked at yet. Looking at the photos gave me a better sense of my work in its entirety, helped me figure out exactly what materials I needed to buy more of, and where to place them. I also got the idea of ironing the white folded clothing, which I thought would strengthen the whiteness as "pure" metaphor.

Brown materials/Multiracial or biracial

Excerpt from my journal about my art-making after working on the white section:

October 21, 2012
1) "Hide" coloured layered clothing underneath white section carefully & subtly…signifies whites hiding their coloured mixed ancestry or society's push for them to do this & therefore white parents purity never questioned…iron a lot of clothing = purity
2) Brown section…make other coloured layers loose & very noticeable… signifies the difficulty of 'hiding' ancestry in mixed people – very obvious…iron
some = some purity
3) Black section – make it noticeable & hidden…signifies idea that mixed ancestry is never considered (so show it but hide it)…don't iron much = little purity

After finishing my white section I started to work with my brown materials. I focused on how I could layer them differently than the white ones because they had to signify something different – that public knowledge of one's ancestry was not as big an issue as it was if one were white. I reflected a lot on the critical stance I had read in literature against the multiracial category because I believed it. I supported critics against multiracial ideology, such as Spencer (2006) and others who saw the

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"multiracial" category as maintaining the false idea that races are fixed entities. Because one of my parents was white and the other black I was labelled multiracial, or what otherwise is a fairly new (late 1980's) constructed racialized category. I wanted to change my thinking about this because by identifying in this way I was also implicating myself in the racialization process. I did not want to call myself "multiracial" anymore, though at the moment I was not sure of a better term (maybe multi-ethnic?). With my brown materials I tried to find a way to link the latter ideas into my work, or the notion that a multiracial may be "mixed" but they are not a product of mixed "races." I started layering white or black items underneath brown ones and sometimes folded them in-between to create multi-coloured layers (see Figure 30 & 31).

As I folded layers of white and black clothing underneath the brown ones, to suggest my mixed ancestry, I struggled because I also wanted to project the fallacy of race, which I believed I was perpetuating by identifying as multiracial. Eventually, I stopped experimenting in this area and could not complete it because I found it too hard to apply-these concepts in a material form.

Figure 30.
Folding blacks in-between browns #1
(October, 2012).

Figure 31.
Folding blacks in-between browns #2
(October, 2012).

Another excerpt from my journal while working on the brown section:

October 21, 2012.

I love working with textures & colour in sculpture...shifting around clothing based on colour, textures, positioning (looking at angles I'm placing them at)...repetition (of above)...discovering new layers of possibilities with clothing (colours, textures, etc.) that I never considered previously

Despite the difficulties I was having in my brown section I made a little progress in making them look different than the ones in the white area because their overall placement was not as orderly. At this time too, I really enjoyed handling my materials and moving them around, as if they were paint or clay and positioning them to make their colours and textures flow in certain ways. In using a lot of recycled materials - shirts, purses, shoes, etc. – I saw them as metaphors for the way different labels have been recycled to identify me. In my being categorized as biracial, multiracial, or visible minority, they have been historically reprocessed from other terms, such as negro, mulatto, coloured, black, and people of colour. I also liked that I have been able to re-use these materials and put them to good use.

Black materials/Blackness

A journal entry reflects my feelings as I worked on the black section of my artwork:

November 9, 2012.
...this is at times tedious and gruelling & other times pleasant

I started working on the bottom black area of my canvas (see Figure 32). In the process of working in this section I worried that the piece was starting to look too busy. This was a reflection of the struggle I was feeling in trying to convert my ideas and materials in ways that represented my perception of the notion of blackness, as mixed. In another sense, the busyness contained in my artwork could be extended as a metaphor related to the theoretical side of my research and its complex subject matter. This included the various concepts related to my topic, the multiple interpretations offered in literature about them, as well as the multi-

faceted nature of my question. Concepts in my research included the many racialized categories I am named with such as black, biracial, multiracial, and visible minority as well as the historical ones they evolved from including negro, coloured, mulatto, people of colour, and so forth. Other concepts related to my investigation included white/whiteness; black/blackness; racialized minority; racial identity; racialized identity; biological or scientific notions of race, among others. In terms of their usage in literature these concepts lend themselves to many interpretations. For example, in discussing the term racial identity, or someone as having one implies a belief in the idea of race, or that people can be classified into separate groups according to their biological differences such as skin colour or hair type, and so forth. On the other hand, to discuss the idea of a racialized identity implies a belief that stereotypical qualities are imposed on people that do not see themselves in the same way. In terms of my research question, it had a series of different but related parts revolving around my mixed identity and the construction of meaning in my art-making. One part included examining my identity through practice-led research (through my art-making). Another part involved exploring my perceptions about my mixed ethnicity (and skin colour), in relation to the racialized categories I am identified with (black, multiracial, etc.). The overall purpose of my inquiry was to generate a discussion and heightened awareness about notions of race in order to dispel negative stereotyping in schools and society. In this way, the busyness I felt happening in my piece could be seen as a mirror reflection of the wide scope of my topic. I covered the black section completely with items even though the brown section was not entirely done (see Figure 33).

Figure 32.
Positioning the black materials
(October, 2012).

Figure 33.
Covering entire black section with
materials (October, 2012).

Brown materials/Multiracial or biracial (continued)

I went back to the middle section and started adding more brown items to it (see Figure 34). I rearranged a lot of clothing and designed them according to their patterns, textures, and colours to try and better symbolize the racialized categories I was labelled with and destabilize the notion of race.

I believed that being called biracial or multiracial, and also naming my self in these ways, suggested that I originated from a "race." I did not believe in the notion of race at all. It has proved to be such a damaging belief and I really wanted it gone from my psyche - dismantled and dissolved. It was important that I try to dispel the latter myth in my artwork. Sometimes I felt I was moving items around aimlessly and wasting time, while at other times I felt I was advancing. Eventually, I filled my entire canvas with materials to create a layering effect but I found the piece looked cluttered (see Figure 34 & 35). I was not exactly sure how to proceed next.

Figure 34.
Entire canvas covered with materials
(October, 2012).

Figure 35.
Entire canvas covered with materials (detail)
(October, 2012).

White/Whiteness, Brown/Multiracial or biracial, Black/Blackness

Notes about my art-making after all 3 sections have been done:

November 16, 2012.
Realized with the black section to put down more organized clothing &
folded neat clothing down first & then add loose more 'disorganized'
clothing
I've had to reassemble all sections...started with white section, then
brown, now I'm on black one...though some spaces on sections done are
empty...still need to add medical supplies
Need to buy more pill boxes...may need more white and brown pills

In the process of removing and reassembling some items, I wanted to create

some "empty" space on my canvas in order to de-clutter it in a physical sense.

Metaphorically, the notion of emptiness as drawn from my art-making was linked

theoretically to my research question, associated with my search for meaning, through my practice (handling and manipulating materials), in an effort to better understand aspects of my identity. I looked at older photos of earlier arrangements I had made to guide me.

       I tried to create a better layering effect with the materials in my black section by placing the first layer down neatly (whether folded or not), and then the layer on top more loosely. By making some black coloured articles appear loosely strewn, I was metaphorically aiming for stereotypes of black people as promiscuous, lazy, and unruly, and so forth. The latter was directly opposite of the layout of materials in my white section that were neatly folded and arranged to suggest stereotypes of white people as orderly, disciplined, and stable. Some of these stereotypes may have been more prevalent in the days of slavery and later with segregation in North America but I think they have carried over and still exist, in varying degrees for different people, and often times less overtly. Currently, in my experience, I feel I am negatively stereotyped, covertly, through being identified as biracial, multiracial, and visible minority, which to me, are just different labels that mean I am black. Likewise, because of my blackness, verbal or non-verbal acts of discrimination have been directed at me, most recently by white students at my job (as I mentioned earlier), though not often. I have been called "nigger" a few times and seen the word written on the tables and walls. Other staff with dark coloured skin have also experienced the same.

       I also wanted to incorporate some medical items into my artwork as a metaphor for the negative effects of racial-based thinking and behaviours in society. I purchased some pills and containers for them from a pharmacy. Most of the pills I got were white but I also had some pills in different shades of brown that I could use. I filled the plastic containers with pills and experimented with placing them on different areas of my canvas. In relation to my inquiry and in a metaphoric sense, the brown and white pills were meant to suggest a general malaise or sickness in society, with respect to racial based stereotyping that can lead to discrimination and violence. I believe that one cause of racial problems, whether minor or more significant, is a result of racialized naming that creates an illusion of difference. Even

though in the past I have identified as biracial, or currently as multiracial, many people still generally categorize me as "black." As a product of a white mother *and* a black father I am recognized as "black." In all of the places I have lived in Canada, mainly among a white majority, I have usually been labelled "black." However, the exception has been (as I mentioned earlier) when I travelled to Ghana and was among a black majority, I was called "white" by some. In this way, my being classified as "black" (and not white) because of my brown skin colour has generated a sense of profound difference from a person labelled as "white." Apart from the surface area of my skin and its different colour, I do not actually feel "black," or experience a sensation of "blackness" in any way that could warrant the extreme difference that it implies. I am only "black" insofar as how I use it as a general descriptor to name myself with, and how others use it to label me, whether in the same way as I do, or negatively. I think it is impossible to have a neutral sense of the word without a harsh or damaging sense of it. Overall, I feel that these kinds of markers are part of a larger problem.

After restructuring my materials I began to fill in some of the empty spaces that had opened up as a result of my removing some items (see Figure 36 & 37). I started to add pills in a variety of plastic transparent pill containers in these vacant spaces.

Figure 36.
Experimenting with pills in containers on empty areas of canvas (white section) (November, 2012).

Figure 37.
Experimenting with pills in containers on empty areas of canvas (black section) (November, 2012).

Journal entries about my art-making as I reworked the 3 sections:

November 17, 2012.
Beginning to design clothing to flow according to positioning, texture and color.
Question:
I have a lot of open canvas space...I could fill them with photos of my mixed ethnic background?...repeat throughout...need to bring photocopies of family/friends...tape on to see effect...

I started experimenting with photocopies of family pictures I had and placed them in the free spaces on my canvas (see Figure 38 & 39). I got the idea of using photos because I had used them in a spoon sculpture I made (see Figures 1 to 3) that explored my perceptions related to aspects of my mixed background. In my current work I used them to represent my mixed background – my brother is mixed like me, my mother had white skin colour, and my father had dark brown skin colour. This also related to my question because I was examining my identity from the vantage point of my perceptions, which was also about personal experience, and the photos represented an aspect of this. Later, after placing some next to my materials, I decided not to use them because I felt they just got lost next to all of my materials.

Figure 38.   Figure 39.

Experimenting with photos on empty   Experimenting with photos on empty areas
Areas of canvas (black section)   of canvas (white section) (November, 2012).
(November, 2012)

More excerpts from my journal about my art-making:

December 1, 2012.
Decided to give canvas under paint to solve problem of empty canvas patches showing beneath clothing...black area will have black paint...brown area will have brown paint...white area will have white paint

December 2, 2012.
Trying to figure out what kind of brown will use – I'm mixing different browns
Will I use one type of brown or will I use 3 types that flow from black & white areas e.g. blend each into each other & also in black & white area ...maybe I should paint underneath clothing & items as I glue them down <u>*instead of painting entire canvas*</u>

      I was still deliberating about the empty spaces in-between my materials and how to cover them up. I did not want the canvas underneath to show because I felt it took away from the overall look of the artwork. I could not equate any symbolic meaning to the unoccupied spaces as they were. If there was no canvas at all in those sections –if I cut them out – that may have worked but I felt it was too risky to do because it would be non-reversible if it didn't. Instead, I thought of painting them. I began painting small pieces of canvas I had with different shades of brown and placed them in different areas on my work to see their effects (see Figure 40 & 41). I let them sit over a period of days and reflected on whether they worked with my overall piece or not.

Figure 40.
Experimenting with colour on empty
areas of canvas (November &
December, 2012).

Figure 41.
Experimenting with colour on
empty areas of canvas (detail)
(November & December, 2012).

I decided the paint did not work because it did not allow for enough contrast between the different coloured materials. I felt that it just made my materials look too crowded. I opted for using medical items instead.

An excerpt from my journal during my art-making process:

November 17, 2012.
Thoughts
I just have to have faith that it's all going to come together.
I'm dismantling my first layering of clothing & rearranging items & it's very frustrating...at times it all seems so futile but I keep going with the knowledge that <u>my piece as a whole</u> is looking better than when I started... it looks more cleaner, more organized, flows better...lets hope with 'fresh eyes' later I still see the same thing

I felt that my artwork was not moving steadily. Sometimes I felt that I was making progress and at other times it seemed that I was just going around in circles. I often felt overwhelmed making it because of its large size and the amount of

materials I was working with (I was experimenting with almost double of what I eventually glued onto my canvas), as well as the fact that I was only able to work on it during the weekends. Choosing a large sized format to work with fit the wide scope of my research topics – racialized categories I am named with, related racialized concepts, my perceptions and experiences, and my response to artworks made by artists using similar themes to my own. My canvas had to be large because it was a metaphor for the complexity of my research topic, which easily got lost in translation. It was hard to know if I had chosen the best items to fit my inquiry and how to aesthetically place them. By this time I had a lot of photo documents to work from and it often seemed that all I was looking at was a disorganized collection of materials on a large piece of canvas. My task seemed daunting, yet I felt a thrill in making it. I liked the challenge my work posed handling materials and trying to make sense of them, in relation to my concerns about identity. A note I made conveys a concern I still had about my artwork: "- still don't know how I should cover small canvas areas showing (maybe with medical supplies…?) (or may just add pieces of cut fabric?)" (Note, November 16, 2012.).

I felt a sense of desperation that I may be trying too hard to find the appropriate materials to fill the "empty spaces" on my canvas. On the other hand, this was what my research question was all about - finding my way through my studio practice, and through the handling of my materials, to make sense of bigger questions about my identity. It was just that I was finding it very difficult to do. Another growing concern I had about my artwork was how to attach all the materials securely onto the canvas. Stitching them on as I had initially planned to do would be too difficult and using glue as I was thinking of doing would not be easy. I experimented with different types of glue on sample pieces of materials and canvas, gluing them together to see how well they attached to each other. I found one that seemed to work better than the rest but using this method would be really messy.

Excerpts from my journal after I took a break from making my art:
January 27, 2013.

Mid-December – started writing text of thesis…as I felt I was going around in circles with my artwork. I felt I went as far as I could developing my installation. It now sits in my studio incomplete (at the time of this writing it has been about 7 weeks). I would say it's ¾ done…Most of the clothes are down. I would like to get back at it & glue my clothes down, especially because we may have to move out of there at any time…

January 28, 2013.
I need to look at my photos of my artwork for a while to get ideas about how I want to continue with it!

There was a lull in my art-making close to the Christmas holidays and weeks after. It began when I felt I was not making progress in my artwork. I still had the problem of not knowing what to do with the spaces unoccupied between my materials. I had been shifting items around too. I felt I needed to give it a break and come back to it later after looking over the photos I had taken.

Another journal entry between my art-making:

February 17, 2013.
Got idea today to have some of brown & black clothing maybe 'hang open' off canvas to reveal inner layers of other colors – or no – maybe have some (very few) of white, black & brown clothing items 'hang open' to show inner layers to kind of say 'this is what it is all about…we're all mixed. But have majority of piece 'hidden.'

In the space of not working, I got a new idea to place some of the materials beyond the frame of my canvas in a way that would show the items layered between them, while the majority of items on it would not. This was meant to convey the idea that many African Canadians/Americans who are considered "black" and many European Canadians/Americans who are considered "white," both come from mixed ancestries, no matter if the common perception is that they do not. Those considered "black" may have "white" lineage and vice versa.

More journal entries between my art-making:

February 17, 2013.
Saw #MLK 50 show (Martin Luther King anniversary) & I teared up
reading the information attached to the MLK images... it made me feel
sad & disheartened how much suffering American blacks have had to (&
still
do) go thru to get the right to vote (1965) & desegregation (1961) & still the
poverty & inequality is happening
I felt a good reason to keep making art if only to educate some people
who may see my work about critiquing the concept 'Multiracial'...I need
to keep working on this theme if only I show it during Black History
month...I don't mind...even if I in the end feel somewhat pigeonholed
Seeing the play Oroonoko last night with Sunita made me think today
about how everyone is sort of to blame for the historical fact of slavery –
whites & blacks combined...the wealthy blacks of Africa sold their own
into the Transatlantic Slave trade & the European white traders just
took if from there...everyone who could make money colluded in on it!

I attended an art exhibition and play during Black History Month that inspired me in my research. The former was an art exhibit called *#MLK 50* that showed the work of a few artists. One of the artworks called *Post-discourse, post-haste* by American artist Carolyn Jean Martin caught my eye because of how she plays with the language of race in the United States (Martin, 2013). In the form of painting installations, the artist uses the residue of gunpowder to create words associated with Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech (e.g. "freedom," "equality," etc.) juxtaposed with language that has emerged in the 21st century as a result of it (e.g. "post-black,""post-racial," etc.) (Martin, 2013). The artist's intention was to critique the notion of American society as post-racial (Martin, 2013). Though Martin uses materials different than mine and my work relates to racialized language associated with how I identify and am identified by others, they are similar in terms of critiquing the idea that North Americans are colour-blind and we are

race-free. Martin assesses the latter from an American perspective, while mine includes a Canadian one. I also saw a theatre production called "Oroonoko" about black slavery, which pointed the blame about the inhumane treatment on both slave trading whites and blacks (dir. Paul Van Dyck, February 16, 2013). These two shows inspired me in my research because they dealt with ideas related to the "black experience," which a large part of my investigation was about. Although I could relate more personally to some of the artwork at the exhibition, the theatre show, though based on a fictional account of historical events, offered another perspective on the history of slavery. Also, in seeing these events and their relationship to mainly black experiences being shown only during Black History month, I resigned myself to the fact that if I continue with this theme in my work this is when it will be most probably viewed.

Some of my journal entries after I started to make art again:

March 23, 2013.
Artwork...idea of "connected but disconnected" make divisions visible but have colors overlap to give sense of continuity...make problematic idea of "blackness and whiteness" e.g. mainly because of false notion of biological race

March 28, 2013.
Yesterday I bought more clothing (and books) from the Sally Ann for my art project...I also picked up the medical supplies...
As is my way, I have another tendency to collect, collect, collect, things. With this artwork it was the items for my project but it was reasonable...yes there are extra clothing and other items I won't use but I needed to try –"handle" – them in order to physically know if they would work in my project.
...have to focus on the studio end of my work because of the situation we are in there. We may have to relocate sooner than later...therefore I need to get it "designed" and then glued down in the next few weeks if possible. Then I can at least roll it or fold it and it can be moved more safely.

I looked over photos of my artwork to see what other items I needed to purchase. I had to be very selective because it was easy to buy unnecessarily and then add to the creative chaos that I was working my self out of. I also reflected on the first sets of photos I took - only piles of clothing on my canvas, then separated by colour, and then it progressed into the piece it is now. I thought it was interesting to see my progression, especially since I had forgotten the beginning stages. It reminded me of how I often start so many projects but dislike going back to see my process, when I know it would be a good thing. It reminded me of how it began, how it germinated, and all the work I put into it. I hate "going back," that has always been a problem of mine – I don't mind doing the work, but rereading it, or re-looking at it, I have always found very tedious, and that I lacked the proper patience for. Despite all of this, the reviewing process can bring a fresh perspective, which I needed at the moment.

I made a sketch (see Figure 42) of a new idea I had - overlapping some coloured materials from different sections, so they would 'flow' into each other more to give the sense of connection I was looking for (between my blackness and whiteness), while still maintaining the division of sections (disconnection between my blackness and whiteness). There was also the concern about moving into a new studio, the only question was when, as there had already been many delays. It was supposed to happen soon so I wanted to get as much of it done as possible, especially all the gluing.

Figure 42.
Materials overlapping, revised sketch (March, 2013).

I returned to my art-making after letting it sit for three months. I used the sketch to help me better visualize what I wanted to do with my artwork. I began shifting some items in the brown section over ones in the white, and moving some white materials beyond the canvas frame (see Figure 43). Some materials in the brown section spilled into the white section and the black area, and others over the sides of the canvas. Some of the black materials overlapped into the brown area (and vice versa), while others spilled over the bottom edges of the canvas.

The idea of having some coloured materials in one section overlapping others, while still generally maintaining separate divisions, related to my research question concerning how I construct meaning through my practice. The latter was an indication of my art process at work, as I tried to develop its symbolism. For example, the overlapping clothing acted as a metaphor for "connection," or the idea that if a person is African/Canadian or African/American and called "black" or "multiracial," has dark or light brown skin, they are connected in the sense that they both generally are of mixed ancestry. The latter goes against the common belief among some people in everyday life, the media, and scholarly writing that African Canadians or African Americans who are classified as "black" are *different* than African Canadians or African Americans who are classified as "multiracial." The perception is that "being black" and having darker skin means that the person is *not* a product of population mixing (e.g. having part European ancestry and African), while "being multiracial" and having lighter brown skin, is. Alternately, the three divided coloured sections on my canvas suggested "disconnection," in relation to how I perceive the idea of my blackness and whiteness and not relating to either, as well as a not identifying with the labels I am called. In terms of my process, the idea of having the materials move beyond the edges of the frame was representative of my interest in developing a wide-ranging topic, beyond the black/white dichotomy, and inclusive of other ethnic groups' racialized tensions.

Figure 43.
Materials overlapping (March, 2013).

More notes I made while making my art:

March 29, 2013.
Print large copies of current art photos – hang in studio to work from…buy more pill boxes…iron white clothes…bring iron…fit in more clothes

March 31, 2013.
…spoke with Eva and she gave me idea to use carpet tape, which will try today…took photos of work and enlarged them and posted on wall…bought empty pill bottles from pharmacy this morning…will buy pills from Wal mart…
iron few more items of "colored" clothing…tape down white section…try to glue all clothing today…add more clothing – decide which ones to use – keep focused on theme.

I made a composite photo of my entire piece (attached together in sections) and taped it on the wall of my studio so I could get a better sense of what was going

on below me on the floor where I was working (see Figure 44). I ironed the entire white section of clothing articles to build on the white stereotype metaphor that was already suggested in their neat folding and placement (see Figure 45). Ironing the white clothing further added to the notion of whiteness as fixed, unchanging, dominant, and so forth. This was especially so, in relation to the brown and black sections beneath it. I also decided to iron a few pieces of clothing in the brown section, as a way to link the white stereotype metaphor more closely to it. By ironing some brown materials as well, I wanted to convey the idea that to be mixed or multiracial, often brings with it the perception that they are more "white," which has been historically true in the period of slavery in North America with more special treatment accorded to mixed persons, usually through better working conditions than their fellow slaves. In contemporary society, the perception has not changed much about the multiracial being more "white" than those with darker skin, but I believe their conditions have, mainly through the fierce efforts of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950's and 60's in the United States. In terms of my perceptions and experience regarding my mixed identity, I think the stereotype is both fitting because I fit into the multiracial profile, which claims that I am white and black, whereas in the past (pre-1970's) I could only be identified as coloured, black, mulatto, and so forth. So, in this sense I am identified as more white than I was, say, when I was 4 years old in 1969.
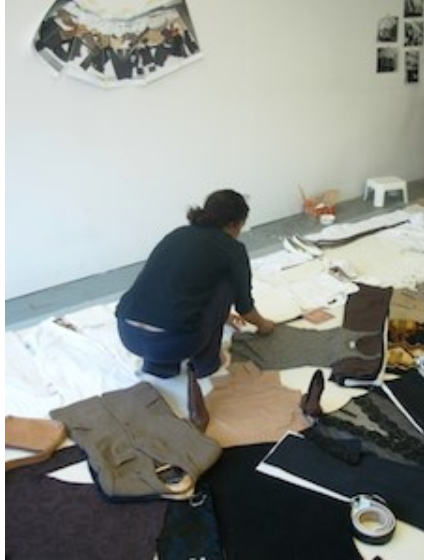
Figure 44.
Working in the studio
(March & June, 2013).

Figure 45.
White clothing ironed (March & June, 2013).

I purchased more pill containers and white pills (aspirin) from Wal Mart - the cheapest place I could find. I filled empty containers already placed on my canvas from a previous session with more pills, either partially, or to the top. I also added more containers filled with pills, interspersing them in new sections on my canvas. Most of the pills were white but some were brown (see Figure 46 & 47). By adding more bottles of pills, I was reinforcing the same metaphor I mentioned earlier that suggested the idea of social unease, disorder, and something in need of repair, in relation to racial-based situations in North American society that stem from stereotyping people in negative ways.

Figure 46.
More experimentation with pills in containers on empty areas of canvas (white section) (December 2012 & April, 2013).

Figure 47.
More experimentation with pills in containers on empty areas of canvas (black section) (December 2012 & April, 2013).

Through a suggestion from a friend, I used carpet tape and began taping each item onto my canvas, including the layers between the materials (whether fabric, leather, plastic, etc.). The solution to use carpet tape was a big relief because for months I had worried that I would have to primarily use glue to secure the materials onto my canvas, which would have been a complete mess. The tape was much cleaner to work with but tedious in its application. I could also change the positioning of items more easily if I did not like the way I put them.

More excerpts from my journal:

April 1, 2013.
My worry about piece is that I have gaps in my brown and black sections. Some of the medical supplies will fill them up & the rest need to be filled with more clothes. I don't know how I will do this without making it look really busy. I'm worried about that, as well as completing my piece by the end of April.

April 7, 2013.
Went to studio to tape down more clothes. Will do 2nd & 3rd layers. May use glue too...need to buy more pills at Wal Mart...buy more carpet tape. When I'm in studio working, I relax about deadlines & feel like everything is o.k., as I immerse myself in the process. I'm where I should be.
This feels overwhelming. I feel like I've set up a daunting task for myself...again. I sometimes do this. I feel like maybe I could have done a less complicated art project...

April 21, 2013.
The taping down of clothes is a slow process. I will add some glue later when all is taped down as reinforcement.

At this stage of my art-making I still had similar concerns, as in previous art sessions, about the unfilled spaces between the items on my canvas and how to

cover them up (see Figure 48). The empty spaces of my artwork were synonymous with an "emptiness" of meaning that I was searching for to fill them with. In filling these spaces on my canvas I thought that I could connect all the physical parts of my artwork together, as well as their symbolism. As well, I experienced both joy and tension working on my piece, back to back it seemed. I had doubts about what I had taken on as a research project, including my question, which was proving to be very difficult for me to examine, especially with regards to the size of my artwork and the amount of materials I was working with.

Figure 48.
Materials on canvas with unfilled spaces
(March, 2013).

I worked in my studio until the end of April, working on weekends, and then took a leave of absence from my job for the month of June, in order to finish as much of my installation as I could. By the first week of June I taped every piece of material on my canvas down. I also reinforced each item with acrylic glue so it would be

more securely attached to the canvas. I added more medical items such as needles and syringes I got from a friend (a nurse), which I filled with glue to mimic liquid. I also added more transparent plastic containers with pills. I experimented with these items and their placement (see Figure 49 & 50). During this process I got another idea to use individual pills on the empty areas of my canvas. After a little more experimenting, I began to glue one pill at a time in these spaces on my canvas, while also using containers filled with pills (see Figure 51 & 52). This took me about a week and a half to do (working 6 to 8 hours a day) until the whole background area was covered (see Figure 53 & 54).

Figure 49.
Working in the studio experimenting with medical items on empty areas of canvas (June, 2013).

Figure 50.
More experimentation with medical items on empty areas of canvas (June, 2013).

Figure 51.
Adding pills on empty areas of canvas (June, 2013).

Figure 52.
Adding pills on empty areas of canvas (detail) (June, 2013).

Figure 53.
All open areas of canvas filled with pills (June, 2013).

Figure 54.
All open areas of canvas filled with pills (detail) (June, 2013).

By adding pills around the empty spaces of my materials, I found the missing link with which to bind my artwork into one whole. Metaphorically, in terms of my art process, meaning was being filled up in these spaces on my canvas. The latter,

reinforced further the idea of society consumed by a kind of general dis-ease, or dysfunction, in the way negative stereotyping perpetuated itself, constantly, producing racial-based thinking and behaviour that maintained ignorance, which often led to hatred and violence. In another sense, using hundreds of pills all over my canvas was symbolic of the idea of "whiteness," usually seen as an "invisible" and unmarked category, now subverted to a very present and visible category perpetuating racialized thinking. The pills were symbolic of excess, accumulation, overindulgence, and so forth, and marked the ways whiteness worked at both the physical level of asset accumulation, and the mental level of attitudes geared to protect white privilege at the expense of those who are non-white in society (Lipsitz, 2006).

I completed a large part of my artwork by the end of June 2013 thinking that I was almost finished. I returned back to my art-making in September and received some feedback from a friend about it. The latter resulted in my removing some items in my artwork and adding others, as well as looking at the artwork of Magdalena Campos-Pons, who at this point I had not heard of. I realized I had more work to do on my artwork than I had thought. In November I removed all of the syringes and pill bottles from my artwork and kept the pills. The syringes and pill bottles visually overstated my work when the pills spoke for themselves. A sea of pills was enough to suggest what was wrong with a racialized North American society that generally viewed itself as post-racial in the 21st century.

Notes I made about making new labels for clothing items:

November 2, 2013.
Dealing with labels...must decide which items of clothing I will 'remake' labels for and add <u>quotes</u> onto
Will size labels now and take photos...

With the feedback I had received earlier about my artwork I got the idea of changing all the original clothing labels that were visible and sewing on new ones that referenced my concerns about my racialized identity. Now in a new studio I had

just moved into a few months prior, I measured and recorded the sizes of each of the 27 clothing labels I was going to use in my artwork. At home on my computer I tried to find the same font and colour match for them. Later, at Concordia University, I learned how to use their digital printer and made some sample labels on cotton fabric as practice.

Journal entries about the content for my new labels:

March 3, 2014.
With addition of labels try to allude to problems linked to my being categorized with racialized labels that result in racist attitude, thought and/or behaviour...my feelings of not connecting with categories I'm labelled with...their perpetuation of stereotyping and maintaining notions of race as biological realities

I wanted the new labels to add more meaning to my work and speak about the problems I have with all the categories I am named with. Using my computer I designed new labels mimicking the originals but with new content. I racialized the clothing labels by rephrasing words to question concepts related to whiteness, blackness, and the biracial and multiracial categories to reveal the contradictions embedded in them. I printed them up on cotton fabric using a digital printer at Concordia University. In my studio I removed the old labels and stitched on the new ones. One example included the label "Flare Gap" on a pair of beige corduroy pants that was changed to "Multiracial Myth" (see Figure 55 & 56). The new text alluded to the idea that the multiracial category was socially constructed and based on the myth of scientific race, which was an argument I supported proposed by those against multiracial ideology. I also changed the label on the brown pair of pants underneath the beige. The original "Boot fit" label was changed to "Racialized Identities: Race fallacy, Social fallacy, Biological fallacy," which suggests that identifying with, or being identified by a racialized category (e.g. black), is linked with false assumptions concerning scientific race and its validity, which gets perpetuated through the classification process (see Figure 55 & 56). Another label I

made was on a black dress whose commercial tag read "Scarlet." I made a new label with the text "3 times racialized: Black, Biracial, Multiracial, ~~White~~," referring to the number of ways I am racialized, while the category "white" is not one of them (see Figure 57). I made 26 labels like this but each were different. Some other constructed labels included "nigger," "Exclusively White," "~~M~~FIXED BLACK."

Figure 55.
Original labels on pants – "Flare Gap" (top) and "boot fit" (bottom) (March, 2014).

Figure 56.
New labels on pants - "Multiracial Myth" (top) and "Racialized Identities: Race fallacy, Social fallacy, Biological fallacy" (bottom) (March, 2014).

Figure 57.
New label on black dress - "3 times racialized: Black, Biracial, Multiracial, ~~White~~"
(March, 2014).

Journal entries about my new labels:

March 24, 2014.
Adding the labels is making my piece significant – they really add something...more meaning to my piece about how I feel about my mixed identity...they're not very visible but they're there! I have to restitch the first one it's not done well...now I'm getting the hang of stitching because I've done a few

I found the new labels I made to be subtler in the way they spoke about my racialized identity, in comparison to the way the large divided coloured sections did. In my struggle to avoid creating metaphors with the materials in too literal a fashion, the new labels provided some much needed nuance.

I reviewed photos of my artwork to see what other changes I needed to make to it. I re-arranged some items to create a better design, for example I took out a multi-coloured gold scarf from the brown section because it visually stood out too much and replaced it with a pair of different coloured bras (beige layered over black) and small leather African pouch (se Figure 58). I glued more pills onto areas where I had taken the pill bottles and syringes off, as well where there they fell off during the move into the new studio. I also replaced a few of the books I was using that didn't relate to my topic with ones that did and changed their placement (see Figures 59 to 61). The latter included books that dealt with issues or stories related to notions of race and dilemmas encountered by real people, or fictionalized characters. For example, "States of Race" explores the real stories of women of colour in the 21st century, "Race Against Time" looks at how the international community has not fulfilled its goals in reducing poverty and providing health care

and education in many countries in Africa, as well as older classics like "The Heart of Darkness" about a European man's journey in the African Congo during its colonization by the Belgians, as well as others. I chose all of the books mainly for their content but also for the colour of their jacket design (black, brown, or white) and size. With these changes, my final artwork *blackness and whiteness* was completed (see Figures 62 to 65).

Figure 58.
Removing some materials and adding others - final changes (June & July, 2014).

Figure 59.
Adding new books – final changes (June & July, 2014).

Figure 60.
Adding a new book – final changes (detail) (June & July, 2014).

Figure 61.
Repositioning books in white section - final changes (June & July, 2014).

Figure 62.
blackness & whiteness (February, 2015).

Figure 63.
blackness & whiteness (detail #1) (February, 2015).

Figure 64.
blackness & whiteness (detail #2) (February, 2015).

Figure 65.
blackness & whiteness (detail #3) February, 2015).

CHAPTER 6: Analysis

"Race has a powerful material, political, and economic currency in our society. Rather than dismiss race, we ought to be honest about it and spend time reflecting on it through critical discussion, instead of sweeping it under the carpet and hope that this will settle everything. Racial categories such as black, white, and brown, etc., no matter how imperfect, are not the problem in themselves. The reality is that these categories organize our society. Rather than deny them, we must challenge the interpretations attached to them." (Dei, 2004)

My qualitative research is framed within an interpretive model that provides thick description of my art-making experience and uses thematic analysis to examine my data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). At the beginning of my study I was concerned with the different racialized labels that are used to define my mixed African and Canadian/European ancestries and how I would construct meaning in my art-making about them. Some of the issues I discussed at the beginning of my study related to my thoughts about my racialized identity and experience, which included: how my blackness has contributed to negative stereotyping and racial name-calling; how my blackness is recognized but my whiteness is not despite my mixed ancestry; how I felt disconnected with my blackness and whiteness; and how I questioned the contradictory nature of the "bi-racial" and "multiracial" categories. In reflecting on the latter in my art-making, I made links to literature on Critical Mixed Race, Sociology, and Creolization, as well as artworks made by Piper, Simpson, and Campos-Pons. This resulted in deeper insights about my mixed identities and seeing them differently than before I began my study. As a result of creating artwork about my identity, I was able to make connections with my journal entries and research to identify metaphors, which included the themes of **shifting**, **positioning**, **layering**, and **openings**.

<u>Shifting</u>

Journaling about my experience and reflecting on race-related literature in my art-making helped **shift** my perception beyond fixed notions of blackness and whiteness embedded within the "bi-racial" category that I was struggling with. Viewing my "bi-racial" identification as problematic in my study was linked to reflections about my sense of disconnection I felt with both my "black" and "white" identities. The latter included not feeling "white" because others did not perceive me that way, and distanced from my blackness because I did not feel a connection to it in a North American cultural sense. My sense of disconnection with my black identity was most probably a result of growing up as a child in a predominantly white Anglo-Saxon neighbourhood with a white Canadian/European mother and similar type friends (though some were mixed and one was black) and because I did not grow up with my black African father. Linking my reflections to early sketches, I developed them with only black and white materials in mind, separating the two colours in half on the canvas, while configuring them in different ways. Other sketch ideas were given form using the older term "mulatto" because I had been called that during a part of my childhood. I also compared my feelings of disconnection with my two identities to Stonequist's fictional Tragic Mulatto character in his 1937 novel, *The Marginal Man*. The author's character represented the struggle a person of mixed ancestry faced internally and in their social worlds, not valued as an individual for their dual ancestry but admonished because of it.

During the planning stage of my art-making I reflected on aspects of my mixed black and white identity, in connection with the Tragic Mulatto figure (Stonequist, 1937). The latter was reflected in my sketches showing black square-shaped symbols against a white background suggesting my past identification with the mulatto category, problems I had with my black/white identity, while also alluding to the fictional mulatto character. Later, I decided not to use the sketches because I felt the meaning I made in connection to their representation of my identity was oppositional and reflected my two ancestries within a state of friction, which I did not want. However, making the sketches provided a kind of "break-through" in my art-making because I found a way of **altering** the mulatto symbol

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and reconfiguring its box-like shape into a horizontal grid-like pattern. **Shifting** materials into a new arrangement in my art-making reflected a **shift** in perception of my two identities as opposites and non-complementary that was hard to release. The latter provided a way forward in my art-making, allowing me to begin building my artwork.

Linking reflections about my identity with race related literature in my art-making, I disassembled piles of black, white, and brown clothing on my canvas and began **shifting** them around. Black items were laid out horizontally across the bottom, white in the middle, and brown ones at the top, roughly suggesting a kind of hierarchical structure. In my art practice, juxtaposing black items with white was a way for me to begin working out the idea that whiteness and blackness only functioned as racialized terms if they were used in opposition to each other to mean two very different things. Blackness, as reflected in my experience and the concerns within my art-making suggested all the things I felt were wrong with the idea and being labelled "black." A journal entry makes note of the latter: " I just don't like the negative perceptions that are attached with being black. For example, I may be seen as being more prone to steal something in a store because the perception is that being black is equated to more likely being poor, or not morally good, so there's more chances I may be watched going into a department store...I may not be perceived to be as smart as my white counterpart because the perception is that many blacks do not get a full education due to their being poor, involved in drugs, etc, so I may be seen to be less intelligent than my white friend…I may get stared at a lot with my white boyfriend even though he is just as mixed as I am, but I'm visibly mixed…"(September 16, 2012). I felt that negative perceptions of blackness resulted in negative stereotyping, racial name-calling, and in its worst form violence, and/or racial profiling by the police and judicial system, and more broadly in economic and social disparity among people with dark skin (Andersen, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Fleras, 2012).

At the outset, **shifting** white materials in the middle of the canvas just above the black was in response to my thoughts about my whiteness and race-related literature. In terms of how others labelled me, I barely felt my whiteness existed,

though having been surrounded by more white people growing up than black, I have internalized some sense of it, however abstract it may be. Generally, it was hard for me to conceive an idea of my whiteness if the notion of my blackness was not linked to it. In relation to literature, the notion of whiteness included it to mean privilege and domination of some over others, as a means of protecting their wealth, property, status, political power, and/or overall opportunities for all of the above (Anderson, 2003; Fleras, 2012; Lipsitz, 2006; Spencer, 2011). I agree with Lipsitz (2003) who theorizes whiteness, or white supremacy, as linked more with the protection of white privilege than contemptuous attitudes towards others, which is realized by "denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility" (p. viii). Both Lipsitz (2006) and Spencer (2011) maintain that white supremacists may also include people who are non-white, and who may be actively or passively involved at different levels of a hierarchical social structure that rewards some more than others. In order for the idea of whiteness to function "public policy and private prejudice" must create an environment where the exploitation of people is required (Lipsitz, 2003, p. vii).

Reflecting on my "black" and "white" identities in my art-making, I tried to **shift** materials around on my canvas and position them in ways that would disrupt the sense of inequality between the two. The latter reflected a **shift** in my perception regarding reflections about my "bi-racial" identification and Creole literature (Cohen & Toninato, 2010). A journal regarding the latter notes: "try to 'de-racialize' the term, or describe it in ways to suggest that its not about a fixed idea of mixed race people, especially black and white but about cultural, social, and linguistic mixing, therefore many people are biracial or mixed race" (May 2012). Reflecting on Cohen and Toninato (2010) and Spitzer's (2003) definitions of the Creole term I realized I could use them as metaphors, in which to view my own identity. Before my study I believed connection to Creole identity happened only through the sharing of brown (or black) skin and not white; and that a person's identity could only be defined by their ancestry and not cultural factors, such as the sharing of language, music, religion, and so forth. The latter allowed a mixed person who had brown skin colour (like myself) to share the same identification with

someone who had "white" skin, while the bi-racial label did not. According to some contemporary definitions, Creole identification did not discriminate in terms of skin colour. To be Creole implied a notion of blackness and whiteness in de-racialized terms because it considered identity in relation to cultural similarities rather than hereditary differences. Alternately, to be "bi-racial" suggested my black and white identities as binaries, while only recognizing my blackness, even if its language suggested otherwise. By **shifting** the perception I had of my mixed identity as dual in nature, to one that made more sense and was in line with my consciousness, I could conceive myself as "black" *and* "white," in the real sense of the term, as acknowledging both my African *and* Canadian/European ancestries.

Positioning

  Changing the way I thought about my bi-racial identity in my art-making coincided with a new **position** I adopted in relation to my multiracial identification. At the start of my study I did not feel completely comfortable calling my self multiracial because the word "race" in itself suggested that a person came from "many" races, which implied a belief in the notion of race, which science has generally proven as false (Davis, 1991; Fleras, 2012; Miles & Torres, 2007; Spencer, 2011). Reflecting on race related literature expanded my understanding about some of the history behind the multiracial category. In my art practice a journal entry reflected my response to some of the literature: "I and we are all multiracial, no such thing as race, multiracial identity will not confuse me…is a social construction" (July 17, 2012). In other journal entries I reflected on ways to conceptualize my new stance towards the multiracial label and how to **position** materials on the canvas to reflect it: "Bottom third mostly black with browns and whites thrown in = all people who are visibly black considered 'Black'…quarter in the middle will be 'pure white' = represents my white side and ideas that white parents' purity is never questioned (while black parents' mixed ancestry is never considered)…rest of top = multi–colors of blacks, browns, whites" (September 28, 2012).

  Positioning black materials at the bottom of the canvas just below the white was a way to represent "black" identity as inferior to "white" identity. Linking the

latter with mixed race literature and the idea of blackness in multiracial ideology, implied that an African Canadian or African American identified as "black," is perceived as monoracial, or having no mixed ancestry (Christian, 2004; Spencer, 2006, 2011). Through this identification, the African Canadian or African American is denied his/her mixed ancestry even though many share a lineage that is diverse. Through denial of the latter, as Spencer (2006) argues, their history is erased, and a "new identity of simply being black is created" (p. 89). In a similar vein, the black items in my artwork linked with the idea of blackness in relation to multiracial ideology, also corresponded with the "one drop rule" and the practice of "hypo-descent" in the United States before and after slavery (Davis, 1991, p. 5; Spencer, 2011). The former stated that anyone with any black ancestry would be classified as "black," while the latter assigned a person of mixed ancestry to the lesser rank of the two (Davis, 1991). The latter brings to mind Piper's artwork *Cornered* that examines the difficult black experience of "passing" in the United States (Bowles, 2011, p. 10). Piper **positions** her materials – chairs, an overturned table, a television screen broadcasting the artist talking about her racialized experience, and her father's white and black birth certificates – in such a way, as to engage her audience in examining the way "black" identity is perceived, often negatively, in relation to "white" identity. Piper's work also reveals the way stereotyping and racist behaviours are perpetuated through individual and collective ignorance.

Alternately, **positioning** white materials in the middle of the canvas just above the black was a way to represent "white" identity as superior to "black" identity. The latter also referenced mixed race literature and a serious flaw within multiracial ideology. White items suggested an essentialist notion of whiteness, which Spencer (2011) notes is "more pure, less diluted, or…more easily corrupted than blackness" and propels the phenomena of the "multiracial" label (p. 123). In terms of the latter, its existence relies on a person being the product of one white parent and the other black, which allows them to claim a "multiracial" identification. On the other hand, if a person is the product of parents who are both black, then they are only allowed to claim a "black" identification. As Spencer (2011) maintains, the underlying principle that allows the "multiracial" category to operate is an

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addition of whiteness to an already present blackness. Through this addition is an assumption that a "white" identity exists and can only be gotten through the "white" parent mixing with the "black" one. However, if two "black" African Canadian or African American parents produced a child, who is to say he or she may not have some other ancestry than their assumed African lineage. Some African Canadians or African Americans have European ancestry, though traces of white skin colour may not be evident as part of their phenotype (Spencer, 2006, 2011). **Positioning** the white materials, in relation to (mis)conceptions about fixed notions of whiteness, allowed for more deeper reflection of my multiracial identification and further **shifting** away from it.

  Positioning materials on canvas in relation to my thoughts about my identity and responses to literature became more problematic. Trying to conceptualize my different identities not as fixed and dual in nature, using mainly solid black, white and brown coloured materials, without obvious representation became difficult to do. Examples of the latter included representing a sense of myself, metaphorically, in Creole (Cohen & Toninato, 2010) terms that did not prioritize one identity over another, or, disrupting my multiracial identification because it implied a belief in the notion of race, which was perpetuated through its use, making it a divisive term. Using specific coloured materials on canvas to reflect these new ideas related to my identity was frustrating and often felt restricting because their representation seemed to suggest predetermined meanings related to the frozen terminologies "black" and "white" implied. I saw the latter as problematic with regards to my reflections about my mixed identity, which in my art-making I was trying to work away from. Though, thinking about myself in different ways fed my art-making, I felt trapped in my practice trying to create new meanings that I was reflecting on, with the kinds of materials I was working with.

  Also, **positioning** a large number of pills on the canvas linked to reflections about my experiences related to being "black." The latter included being negatively stereotyped because of my skin colour; being called racial names; sometimes feeling inferior as a result of the above; and problems identifying with an abstract term that operates in a neutral way, and at the same time can be very damaging. Reflecting on

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the negative associations linked to my blackness in my art practice, the white pills, often associated with illness, became a symbol for all that I felt wrong with my racialized black identity. Similarly, linking my art-practice to race related literature, the pills also served as a metaphor for the general malaise or discontent in contemporary society with regards to people deemed "different." The latter reflects research that shows socioeconomic discrepancies between African Canadians and African Americans with dark skin colour compared to Canadians and Americans with white skin. For example, African Canadians and African Americans or blacks, are considered to be in much less favourable conditions when it comes to their income; housing conditions; jobs and job opportunities; education; ownership of property; treatment by police and in the court system (racial profiling) (Andersen, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Fleras, 2012; Lipsitz, 2006). Also, in relation to reflections concerning both my blackness and whiteness, the sea of white pills suggested fundamental problems with them. The latter included the different racialized identities – "black," "white," "bi-racial," "multiracial" – each inherently contradictory with its own history(ies), meanings, and interpretations, while claiming my identification.

Through journaling I found another way to weaken the racialized categories that attempted to define me in limiting ways, as noted in an entry: "With addition of labels try to allude to problems linked to my being categorized with racialized labels that result in racist attitude, thought and/or behaviour…my feelings of not connecting with categories I'm labelled with…their perpetuation of stereotyping and maintaining notions of race as biological realities" (March 3, 2014). In my practice I changed all the visible clothing labels and remade new ones, as a way to question racial concepts used to define me, and others, while also alluding to them as social constructions that can be rethought differently. For example, creating the new label "M̶FIXED BLACK" was a way to suggest the general perception of others regarding those identified as black, as monoracial, or from one race, rather than having mixed ancestry. While the new label emphasized a preconceived notion of blackness, it also served to disrupt it by allowing the viewer to see how the term's meaning had been altered from its original by crossing out the first letter "M" and replacing it with an

"F." By renaming all the visible clothing labels on my canvas, I found a way to deconstruct misperceptions related to categories I was named with, while strengthening my awareness about the ambiguity of their meanings. The latter allowed a **repositioning** of my thinking towards notions of my blackness and whiteness not mired in contradictions.

The construction of new labels combined with the **positioning** of coloured materials, divided in a kind of hierarchical structure representing racialized difference, linked with my reflections on race related literature. The latter challenged current and popular conceptions of American and Canadian society as anti-racist and colour-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Fleras, 2012). For example, from an American perspective it dealt with Afro-Puerto Rican scholar Bonilla-Silva's (2010) ideology of "New Racism" or "Color-blind" racism (p. 2-3). The core principal underlying Bonilla-Silva's (2010) ideology includes the belief that racial inequality still exists in United States, as a result of "covert and institutionalized" (p. 3) practices, despite the general view among many people that problems of race have generally disappeared. Similarly, from a Canadian perspective, the German born immigrant and scholar Fleras, (2012) argues that "Canadian racism" (p. 70) is fully functional, and involves an ideology of "explicitly" extolling "racial superiority," "beliefs or practices involving coded comments about inferiority, and" "individuals and institutions without any clear racialized reference but whose actions may exert adverse consequences" (p. 70). In the past, discriminatory practices happened overtly in both Canada and the United States, despite any differences in degree, whereas currently they happen in less obvious ways. The latter includes segregation of communities by white landlords who employ subtle tactics to steer black renters or buyers from obtaining the property; biased behaviour of white employers towards black employees in hiring practices, or in terms of advancement; unequal educational opportunities for racialized minorities; overly stereotyped representation of blacks in the media, under representation of blacks in middle and upper levels of political and other social institutions, and racial profiling in the legal system (Andersen, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Fleras, 2012; Lipsitz, 2006). In terms of constructing new labels on the clothing to deconstruct racialized categories that

define me, it links with the literature on race. The new text and labels on the clothing are readable but not very visible compared to the clothing they are embedded in, and the overall hierarchical structure of coloured materials they are a part of that are very obvious in an "in-your-face" kind of way. In relation to Bonilla-Silva's (2010) and Fleras' (2012) racial ideologies, the new "hidden" text on the clothing alludes to the covert unfair social and economic practices happening among people of colour in contemporary society, which may not be very noticeable unless scrutinized more closely. The labels and **positioning** of clothing on the canvas question the truthfulness of color-blind racisms claims that people are generally free from prejudice and racial discrimination, regardless of their colour.

Layering

Through more journaling and reflecting, in my art practice I decided to move the entire white section from the middle of the canvas to the top, and begin **layering** materials, as noted in my entries: "**Layering** of clothing…black on bottom **layer** = signifies idea of those who are mixed always identified as black (at base, encrusted at the bottom)…brown (mixed white and black) middle layer = in-between black at bottom and white at top, product of both…white at top = at top to signify position of whites on the societal hierarchy scale…There will be pieces of all above types of clothing and items interspersed throughout each of **layers** e.g. some white and brown in black **layers**, some black in white, etc. = to signify the notion that all peoples coming from different ancestral backgrounds are mixed…" (July 17, 2012). Repositioning my coloured materials suggested a **layering** or dividing of different groups into a kind of social and racialized hierarchical structure. By shifting the white materials to the top of the canvas, "whiteness" was positioned above the rest of the coloured sections, which reflected literature on racial ideology.

Layering materials by placing white items at the top of the canvas, brown in the middle, and black at the bottom, linked to Bonilla-Silva's (2010) prediction of an "emerging racial order" in the United States (p. 179). The latter included white materials in my artwork to suggest the elevated position "Whites" will hold as the economic powerhouse in a "triracial stratification system" (p. 180), which includes

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established white people, new European immigrants, assimilated Latin or Native Americans, and some very light skinned multiracials (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Brown materials in the middle of the canvas was representative of Bonilla-Silva's multiracials, or "Honorary Whites" who because of their lighter skin tone, are "closer" to "whiteness" (p. 180). The latter includes light-skinned Latinos, Chinese Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, light-skinned African Americans, and others (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Black materials at the bottom of the canvas suggested all people with dark skin colour, or the "Collective Black" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 180). The latter includes dark-skinned Latinos, Vietnamese Americans, New West Indian and African immigrants, Blacks, Reservation-bound Native Americans (or First Nations as they are known in Canada), and others that make up a part of Bonilla-Silva's racial ideology for North America's future (p. 180).

Similar to Bonilla-Silva's (2010) buffer group, or "Honorary Whites" (p. 180), predicted to be positioned in-between the top and bottom groups, are Spencer's (2011) multiracials who, he argues, many see as proof that an old racial order has dissolved. For example, current popular perception among North Americans includes the idea that the existence of a growing group of multiracials, or mixed-race individuals, means that the United States has entered a post-racial era (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Spencer, 2011). According to Fleras, (2012), a similar perception of "race neutrality" (p. 52) exists within Canada's multicultural social fabric which does not reflect the social and economic inequalities between people of non-European descent or racialized minorities, compared to Canadians of European origin, or whites. Fleras (2012) argues that the latter is a result of "ideas and ideals pertaining to race (in terms of what is acceptable or desirable)" that "are structurally aligned in ways that promote mainstream white interests over those of other racialized groups without peoples awareness of the biases at play" (p. 53). I agree with the authors that a growing amount of multiracials or visible minorities in North America does not necessarily equate to a society that is free from racial problems. Rather, more systemic processes continue to operate that are less noticeable than in past decades but persist in privileging "dominant and subdominant" groups to legitimize and advance their own interests at the expense of others (Fleras, p. 58). One way

forward in challenging thinking against hierarchies of race that allow systems of domination to exist is to dispel fixed ideas about whiteness that perpetuate false notions of race that help feed superior perceptions of "identity" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Fleras, 2012; Spencer, 2011).

Layering materials in my art practice also involved putting white items in-between brown and black ones and vice versa, in each of the different sections. Linked to mixed race literature, folding clothing or laying books on top of each other on the canvas in this new way exposed a flaw in multiracial ideology, or multiracial identification. The latter only allowed identification if a person had one "white" and one "black" parent. This suggested a predetermined idea of both identities as somehow being complete in themselves without previous hereditary mixing other than the one it claimed. By mixing different coloured clothing together, it subverted essentialist notions of whiteness, or what Spencer (2011) argues, as "existing as it is by first having created and then feeding perpetually upon blackness in order to maintain itself as a seemingly independent essence" (p. 276). I agree with Spencer who further states that the multiracial category is another "new biological racial category," which cannot "deconstruct whiteness precisely because it is a slave of whiteness" (p. 276). In practice, the **layering** of clothing functioned as a way to dismantle the underlying structures that held the notions of whiteness and blackness together. By doing the latter, I could more easily **reposition** my self away from the "bi-racial" and "multiracial" categories that I no longer wanted to identify with, or be identified by.

Openings

Part of the final stages of my art-making involved solving the problem of filling empty areas on my canvas, which came about after covering it entirely with materials and then removing some because it looked too cluttered. These **openings** or empty spaces on my canvas were problematic because aesthetically my artwork did not look complete with them. Having experimented earlier with putting plastic bottles of pills and syringes on my canvas, I decided to only use pills, which I layered around the items, as a way to fill up the **open** spaces. Linked to reflections about the

"absence" of "whiteness" in my own experience, the pills filled a gap in relation to that category, which remained almost hidden, as an aspect of my identity. In connection with race related literature, hundreds of white pills all over the canvas, as metaphor, reversed the idea of whiteness as invisible or an "unmarked category," making it very visible (Andersen, 2003; Fleras, 2012; Lipsitz, 2006, p. 1; Spencer, 2011).

Openings, as related to deeper understandings, also linked with some of the artists' works that I looked at in my study that used similar themes related to identity and race as I did. For example, in referencing Simpson's artwork *You're Fine* (Jones, Golden & Iles, 2002, p. 33) I became more aware of the gracefulness with which her work operated through combining images with text about blackness, or the black racialized body, as a result of having difficulty making art about my own experiences. In *You're Fine,* Simpson positions her text with broken up images of a black female body that defies common stereotypes and refuses to represent the notion of blackness in easy and clear terms. The artist's ability to generate meaning(s) that question notions of blackness with visual beauty and simplicity are what fascinates me. I found it hard to conceptualize aspects of my mixed identity using clothing items, books, pills, and so forth. The addition of text, in the form of new clothing labels in my artwork helped to bring it together. In the course of my study I discovered Campos-Pons work *Sugar/Bittersweet* (Campos-Pons, Muehlig & de la Fuente, 2010), which **opened** my eyes to an artist outside of a North American context (though she has been living in the U.S for over 20 years) working with race-related themes. I found it interesting the way Campos-Pons uses her materials to address her mixed Cuban, African, and Chinese heritage, while linking it with the slave based sugar industry in Cuba. Like Simpson, the artist's positioning of her materials - different coloured sugars, African spears and stools – appears graceful but also threatening. However, through my practice, I created meaning that was significant and truthful to my self, which involved examining fundamental problems underlying notions of blackness and whiteness that were defined in fixed terms. As a result, looking at the categories I was labelled with through my art-making provided an **opening,** or deeper awareness about my status as a person of mixed ancestry in

North America. Before my study, I had some problems identifying or being identified as "black," "bi-racial" or "multiracial" because of their misrepresentation of me through negative stereotypes, and/or misleading ideas they perpetuated about people with dark skin colour. Through making art about my experience I have a better understanding of these classifiers, which claim my identification, and what they mean, in terms of their history(ies) and links with racial and multiracial ideologies. In completing my study, I can better situate my identity, or my mixed African and Canadian/European ancestries within a contemporary context, and see aspects of my understanding applied in the field of education.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

<u>Significance of the Study and Implications</u>

Exploring racialized aspects of my identity through my studio thesis has broadened my awareness about the act of naming or identification as a cultural process tightly connected with personal, social, and historical factors (Lippard, 1990). In my experience and through this study, I became more aware that categories I identify with, or that others use to identify me with, are always conditional and dependent upon someone else's understanding of its meaning(s), and more broadly on social and/or legal definitions of the terms. This knowledge is not new, especially in literature on race that looks at black or other identities, and their formations through historical and cultural processes. However, in my case, I have become more aware that the categories I use, whether chosen by me, or provided by society, are never only neutral but are often embedded with, and the cause of, negative racial stereotyping (Lippard, 1990). In terms of my study, having been called racial names by high school students in my workplace, directly and indirectly, compelled me to ask "what is in the name 'nigger' that is so offensive to me?" I know that some black people call others who are the same colour as them "nigger," and it is totally acceptable but if it's said to them by a white person, its meaning becomes offensive. This is how I felt because when a student called me "nigger" it was meant as an insult. In general, even though I do not experience racist behaviour frequently at the school where I work, it does happen every so often, whether to me, or other colleagues of mine with dark skin, and it is a problem.

In being discriminated against because of my colour, I empathize with the artist Piper (1987) who made the following statement as a black woman having "passed" as a white person: "…Sometimes what we observe hurts so much we want to disappear, disembody, disinherit ourselves from our blackness…Our experiences in this society manifest themselves in neuroses, demoralization, anger, and in art" (p. 6). My skin colour is similar to Piper's but I have never "passed" as white and did

not experience the same kind of racial segregation that she did living in the United States. Living in Canada post-1965, I did not grow up in a community segregated on racial lines but I do remember the first racist remark shouted at me when I was younger. In this sense, I feel that our different experiences cannot be compared because Piper has a familiar lived experience with racial segregation in a way that I do not. However, I have been a target for racist behaviour, and despite differences of degree between our racial experiences, racism is racism, regardless if the act is directed at a person who is African Canadian, African American, Asian, Arab, Jewish, First Nations, East Indian, and so forth. What matters is not how much it is done but that it is done. Being labelled "black" by others, or myself, has sometimes caused a flow of negative associations, spiralling from television, film, news stories, personal attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and/or education, which have lead to negative stereotyping and racist behaviour. The question that follows is "What can be done?"

My studio thesis began as a way to approach the question of racial shaming through racial name-calling because of labels that perpetuate negative stereotypes. Personally, in my experience, I did not like the way I could be manipulated into feeling inferior to somebody else by being called a racial slur, and/or feel anger or hatred towards a person. In knowing that I could not stop a student, or anyone else for that matter, from calling me something I did not want to be called, I could try not to feel bad or humiliated, and not internalize the assault if someone decided to do this. I have often done this in my teaching practice, disregarding slights directed at me, or not, whether verbal, or written on classroom desks and walls. As I have been teaching for almost 11 years now, racist attitudes and behaviour in my workplace is not a new phenomenon, especially among students themselves, and sometimes between students and staff, as I have mentioned. So, this study was a way for me to examine racial problems as I saw them from my perspective, while acknowledging that others have had more frequent and/or harsh experiences than mine. To some, the latter may appear inconsequential, or easily rationalized as "isolated incidences" because there does not seem to be enough racial situations to warrant it more serious. As I see it, a problem is a problem, whether they manifest as seemingly small and somewhat insignificant occurrences, or reoccur often. The latter can

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become potentially or evidently unmanageable, and/or dangerous, if not dealt with effectively, for the person or people involved whom the racial behaviour was directed at.

Engaging in a studio thesis exploring aspects of my mixed black and white identity has allowed me to examine race-related issues as they affect me personally, as well more broadly, in an educational context. The act of making art in relation to personal experience, linked with literature, and systematically tracking the process, has enabled me to delve more deeply into things that matter. The latter was true despite that more often than not, working creatively with materials on my canvas, in combination with other methods – journaling about my experiences, making sketches, critical reflection, documenting my process with photographs, looking at other artists work, and finally writing about my art-making experience – was hard to navigate through. As well, I experienced a lot of delays during my research but nevertheless, in the doing I learned a lot. Foremost, in creating meaning in my artwork, in relation to perceptions about my mixed identity, it centered on disrupting essentialist notions of blackness and whiteness inherent in the racialized labels I identify with and am called. The different categories I use such as "black," "bi-racial," "multiracial" or "white," which I do not use, all signify problems related to fixed ideas about identity and misconceptions about notions of race, which can lead to negative stereotyping and/or racist behaviour inside and outside the classroom.

In terms of my own art teaching, it goes without saying that a multicultural curriculum is imperative because of the growing diversity of students in schools in North America (Banks, 2006; Sleeter and Grant, 2009). The latter may include differences in ethnicity (and skin colour), language, religion, physical abilities, sexual orientation, gender identification, and so forth (Sleeter and Grant, 2009). In my teaching I have observed some of the differences that Banks and Sleeter and Grant mention and have taught different lessons to address this diversity. The latter have included art projects in which students have examined aspects of their ethnic backgrounds and identities, as well as that of others, through mask-making and drawing cultural self-portraits. Other projects have been more collaborative in

which people from the LGBT community were invited into my classroom to engage students in discussions about their lives and then later the students created "anti-homophobia" posters to fight against discrimination within that community (as part of a wider school board contest). Still, in dealing with the focus of my research and the racialized labels I am identified with, which can propel negative stereotyping and racist behaviour, there are other art projects I would like to create for students to examine these topics more in-depth. For example, projects involving critical analysis of artworks produced by artists from African, First Nations, Chinese, and other ethnicities can be used to discuss and reflect upon artists' perspectives of their work, in relation to students' viewpoints regarding them (Knight, 2006). Through examining imagery in artworks and their possible relationship to negative stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes, students may question assumptions they have about a particular ethnic group (Knight, 2006). Based on the latter discussion, students can create their own artworks using collage, painting, or drawing, using images that portray stereotypes related to their own ethnic or cultural backgrounds, in order for more personal reflection and examination of them. When students create work that is personal but representative of social perceptions (whether current or in the past) through this process, they can better understand how stereotypes are constructed through artworks or media images.

In conclusion, I believe in what Sleeter and Grant (2009) call a multicultural social justice education based on social reconstructionism, which is an approach that aims to prepare students to reconstruct society to better serve the interests of all people, especially those who are oppressed. The latter includes creating projects with an emphasis on developing an understanding of "the nature of oppression in modern society" and how students' life experiences and their culture(s) "impact on that oppression" (Sleeter and Grant, 2009, p. 198). In order to teach students to become critical learners it is also important for educators to look at their own assumptions and values they may take for granted (Billings, 1995). Honest reflection on one's own shortcomings can better position teachers to deal with controversial issues related to race, gender, heterosexism, privilege, power, and so forth. In closing, images are a powerful form of expression and learning. Through

visual arts, whether making it and/or looking at it critically, students can explore a variety of themes, including those related to identity that link with negative stereotyping, which can help them to question the labels that bind us all and to rethink the way people are thought about.

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