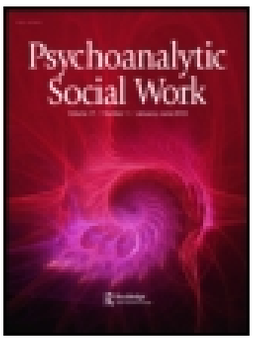

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"Know Whence you Came": Psychoanalytic Theory, Queer Theory, and the Mixed-Race Experience

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ABSTRACT

Deeply rooted U.S. cultural practices and legislative processes have facilitated the dissociation, erasure, and evasion of engagement with mixed-race subjectivities. As multiracial clinicians, we attempt to reexamine the discourse around race in psychoanalytic literature, questioning the process by which dominant monoracial norms have been constructed, reproduced, and codified as normal and acceptable. We propose that the absence of multiracial subjectivities from the psychoanalytic literature reflects a broader social discomfort with and cultural dissociation of the mixed-race experience. We further suggest that it is necessary to engage both analytically and queer-ly with the subjective experience of racial multiplicity—positing that multiracial subjectivities might best be understood as subjectivities that are "racially queer."

KEYWORDS

mixed race; multiracial; psychoanalysis; queer theory; social work; race

Introduction

> You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity. Wherever you have turned, James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do (and how you could do it) and where you could live and whom you could marry. I know your countrymen do not agree with me about this, and I hear them saying, "You exaggerate." They do not know Harlem, and I do. So do you. Take no one's word for anything, including mine—but trust your experience. Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go.
>
> —James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation," 1963—

Urgency is laced with poetics as Baldwin's letter to his nephew grapples with race and the experience of Black Americans. His observations read like a new gospel: nothing is inevitable; hope and aspiration are antidote to the oppressive brutality of American racism; traumatic enactments can be disrupted, pathways reconsidered if, as Baldwin urges, you can "know whence you came" (p. 8).

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Nearly 60 years later, psychoanalyst Francisco González submits a comment during an online colloquium hosted by the International Association of Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy (González, 2018). González suggests that to engage with psychoanalysis' history is to reckon with a history of homophobia. He refers to an experience with a patient, writing, "What he (and I) often wondered about together was to what extent, given the history of psychoanalysis, it was possible to simultaneously think analytically and also queer-ly. It was not a small question. How does one come to think outside or beyond the theoretical structures one inherits? How does cultural change happen?" (November 8, 2018). In this way, González, too, encourages us to know whence we came. Instead of addressing a nephew, he beseeches his professional kin "to engage with the history of our theoretical entanglements, of what we have inherited, and to do analytic work on them" (November 8, 2018).

With this article, we heed this call, and take up these tasks. By focusing on the subjective experience of multiracials as they are addressed, misaddressed, and unaddressed within the psychoanalytic literature, we begin to examine from whence we came. And as multiracial clinicians, we attempt analytic work on this history. Here, queer theory helps us question the way dominant norms come to be constructed, go unchallenged, and are then indexed as barometers of psychological health, social acceptability, and normative behavior (Peterson, 2013, p. 486).

So, queer-ly, we shift our gaze to the margins, finding pockets of plurality, inconsistency, deviance, and possibility. These are the links to our own experience. It is from this place that we reexamine the racial discourse in psychoanalytic literature. We have found that it is not only possible but necessary to engage analytically and also queer-ly with the subjective experience of racial multiplicity—an experience, we posit, that can be best understood as one that is "racially queer."

Expanding on our earlier work (Jamali, 2019 forthcoming; Méndez, 2015), we propose that the absence of mixed-race experience from the psychoanalytic literature reflects a broader U.S. discomfort with and cultural dissociation (Bodnar, 2004; Yi, 2014) of racial multiplicity. Deeply rooted cultural practices and legislative processes have facilitated the dissociation, evasion, and erasure of engagement with mixed-race subjectivities—identities that are both materially and theoretically unsettling. As clinical social workers, we are conscious that the field of social work has long attended to the social surround, integrating other disciplines to expand its understandings. Queer theory, with its attention to fluidity, trans* frameworks, and multiplicity, offers such a theoretical lens from which to reconsider racial multiplicity. Thus we find ourselves engaged in both a return to and a departure from our theories in order to find where we might go.

A brief (and incomplete) history of race and psychoanalytic theory

Race and racial anxieties are deeply embedded in the history of psychoanalysis (Brickman, 2003; Gilman, 1993). During the late 19th century, continental Europe was in the throes of a thick preoccupation with racial classification (Painter, 2010). Discussions of colonialism, eugenics, human development, and human capacity were intimately connected with issues of race. In this climate, virulent anti-Semitism flourished alongside the question of whether Jews were a race apart from other continental Europeans. Given that this is, as a discipline, from whence we came, it is worth noting that psychoanalytic theory could not possibly be inoculated against its own racial preoccupations. Might our discipline's historic disavowal and avoidance of race be a reflection of just such racial preoccupations and anxieties?

At the same time, an awareness of the mixed-race experience can be found obscured within the origins of psychoanalysis. Freud makes reference to race and, specifically, the multiracial individual in his 1915 paper *The Unconscious* (Freud, 1915/1957). In a discussion of the relationship between the unconscious and preconscious, he writes, "We may compare them with the individual of mixed race, who taken all round, resemble white men, but who betray their Colored descent by some striking feature or other, and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges of white people" (p. 191).[1]

This passage does not reveal Freud's opinions on race, but rather indicates that he was in dialogue with racial anxieties of the day. Like much of Freud's writing, it can be read in multiple ways. Freud uses the mixed-race experience as metaphor. Is he associating primitivity with non-Whiteness, suggesting that underdeveloped parts of consciousness are akin to mixed-race people—something uncivilized, unruly, not fully formed, subhuman, intolerable, and therefore cast into the unconscious to be excluded? Or is Freud cautioning against this very reduction, suggesting that because the conscious and unconscious are always intermixed, so, too, are any efforts at establishing a secure race or subjectivity? All consciousness includes elements of the unconscious, all subjectivity is slippery and unstable, and all race is mixed. Freud seems to anticipate queer theory's contemporary efforts to conceptualize how the unconscious destabilizes secure subjectivity and highlights the fluidity and multiplicity of gender, sexual, and racial identity (Costa, 2012). Interestingly, this passage also evokes specific dynamics often associated with queer racial experience: those of passing and the exposure in being outed.

In recent years, psychoanalytic writing has produced a notable body of literature exploring race. Topics have included racial difference in dynamic treatment (Altman, 2000; Leary, 1997; Leary, 2007; Méndez, 2015), racism

(Suchet, 2004), race as part of cultural competence in psychoanalytic treatment (Tummala-Narra, 2016), race and melancholia (Eng & Han, 2000), race and narcissistic injury (Layton, 2006), skin tone (Tummala-Narra, 2007), and Whiteness (Altman, 2006; Parker, this issue). Although the psychoanalytic field has pursued a deeper clinical engagement with race, the subjective and theoretical experience of multiracials remains conspicuously overlooked. At present only two psychoanalytic articles foreground the mixed-race experience.

One of our previous articles, *My Sister Tried to Kill Me: Enactment and Foreclosure in a Mixed-Race Dyad* (Méndez, 2015), makes conscious some implicit assumptions about race. Through her work with a mixed-race patient, Teresa explores the dynamics that emerge when race is assumed through physical features alone, underscoring that markers such as skin color cannot truly reveal or reflect one's racial reality. Notably, within the psychoanalytic literature, Teresa is, heretofore, the only self-identified mixed-race clinician to address the experience of mixed-race subjectivity. Using her own experience of discordance and erasure, she explores the splitting, dissociation, and shame that emerge when internal identifications and external recognition do not align, suggesting such dynamics may be inherent in the mixed-race experience.

Bonovitz's 2009 article "Mixed Race and the Negotiation of Racialized Selves: Developing the Capacity for Internal Conflict" also explores racial identification, equating racial multiplicity with incompatible self-states. He points to the traumatic history of U.S. anti-miscegenation laws, attributing the dissociative processes and fragmentation of his biracial patient, in part, to this prohibition. Bonovitz (2009) suggests that macro-level social traumas are woven through the micro-level interactions of the analytic hour, and offers integration as a goal of treatment.

Neither article, however, takes up the analytic task of wondering why, besides their two contributions, racial multiplicity is omitted from consideration in the analytic canon.

Increasingly, psychoanalytic literature has called for a more nuanced consideration of race. "What *do* we mean when we speak of racial or ethnic identities?," asks Layton (2006). "Can we assume, in other words, that a racial identity is homogenous, that blacks and whites of all classes and both genders experience race in the same way?" (Layton, 2006, pp. 237–238). While such questions are important, we are asking slightly different ones: Why is it that mutiracials, the fastest-growing racial demographic in the United States, are largely absent from the psychoanalytic literature (Pew Research Center, 2015; Velasquez-Manoff, 2017)? And what does this tell us about the experience of race in this country and how it is understood?

We have only just marked the fiftieth anniversary of *Loving v. Virginia*, the Supreme Court decision that legalized interracial sex and marriage. Prior to this decision, marriage and sexual relationships between individuals of different races were illegal for more than 300 years. The history of race in the United States includes a variety of such legal protections and maneuvers instituted to safeguard the monoracial subject. Long constructed as singular, boundaried, and impermeable, the mixed-race subject destabilizes, disorients, and demands a muddier and more fluid understanding of race. Yet rather than engage with or question monoracial assumptions, we suggest that through its silence psychoanalysis has reproduced the cultural dissociation of mixed-race experience.

Cultural dissociation

In a historical account of the creation of modern-day racial indexes and identifications, Painter (2010) shows how, over the past 100 years, the discourse on race has come to view race in more rigid terms. Exploring the history of Whiteness as a racial concept and classification, Painter (2010) points to the social, political, and cultural factors behind the creation of race, debunking the notion that race and racial categorization have ever been fixed or constant. In short, race is anything but innate. Yet, we, in this country, adhere to our rigid, dissociated definitions.

This is especially apparent in the racial categories put forth in the U.S. Census. Although formal anti-miscegenation ended in 1967, it was not until 2000 that the U.S. Census Bureau allowed people to identify with two or more races (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Prior to 2000, the census taker would assign a single race based on an individual's appearance. Along with conventions such as the one-drop rule, mixed-race people have historically been subsumed within monoracial classifications. Such practices have served to manage the fear of physical and psychological contamination—and created ways to undermine class unity by, for example, keeping poor Whites and Black slaves from joining forces against oppressive and economically disenfranchizing systems.

As we have previously outlined (Jamali, 2019 forthcoming; Méndez, 2015), cultural practices and policies, such as anti-miscegenation laws, the one-drop rule, segregation, and cultural stereotypes, have been employed to uphold the illusion of race as boundaried, with distinct, indelible markers (Root, 1992). Rather than reevaluate our cultural beliefs about race, and its attending social and psychological structures, the mixed-race experience has been erased, split off, and ignored. Such ongoing disengagement with racial multiplicity can be understood as a form of cultural dissociation (Bodnar, 2004; Yi, 2014).

Contemporary relational theory provides the basic framework for understanding how dissociative processes arise in clinical encounters. From mild avoidance to more pervasive disturbance, dissociation is now considered not only normal but inevitable. Expanding on this conceptualization, the psychoanalytic literature has explored how an understanding of dissociative mechanisms (Davies, personal communication, 2002, as cited in Bodnar, 2004, p. 587) can be applied to the role of cultural phenomena within the clinical setting. Focusing on class (Bodnar, 2004), immigration and exile (Harlem, 2010; Yi, 2014a and Yi, 2014b), and gender and sexual location (Dimen, 2004), contemporary analytic writers have considered the way such psychological accommodations are used in encounters with cultural and individual multiplicity. Coining the term "cultural dissociation," Yi (2014a) proposes that avoidance of aspects of one's culture of origin within therapy is a result of the overwhelming affect linked to these cultural elements. As such, cultural dissociation can be understood not just as the erasure of culture but as a pervasive shutdown in the face of the overwhelming affect evoked by such culture.

Yet while psychoanalysis' lack of engagement with racial multiplicity mirrors and colludes with broader cultural dissociation, queer theory and its engagement with fluidity and multiplicity offers a complementary framework with which to consider the subjective experience of multiplicity.

Queer theory

Defined as both "contemporary academic discourse and mode of analysis" (Peterson, 2013, p. 489), queer theory has increasingly been utilized by a variety of disciplines, including social work, to explore multiplicity, fluidity, and the construction of normative frameworks (Ahmed, 2017; Iasenza, 2010; Kassoff, 2004; McPhail, 2004; Peterson, 2013). Queer theory offers "social work another critical lens from which to examine its own embedded assumptions … " (Peterson, 2013, p. 489).

By engaging with the incongruities and paradoxes (Iasenza, 2010, p. 291) of subjective experience, queer theory highlights the limits of essentializing narratives, recognizing that identity is not prescriptive and finite, but fluid, variable, and multidimensional (Grossman, 2002). And by normalizing inconsistency, a queer lens upends the a priori authority of existing categories. Identity is viewed as a dialectic process, in which meaning and understanding are constructed, unscripted, and evolving (Jagose, 1995, as cited in Grossman, 2002).

In particular, when internal identifications do not align with external signifiers, a queer framework permits an unsettling and "reimagining" (Iasenza, 2010, p. 291) of a more inclusive model of experience. Writing

about sex and sexual practices, Iasenza (2010) calls our attention to "queer moments" that emerge "in therapy when we feel perplexed, off balance, or uncomfortable" (p. 292). Rather than avoid contact with the intensity and uncertainty that such encounters elicit, queer engagement encourages a more expansive embrace.

So what do queer models and theories teach us about racial multiplicity? Is the mixed-race experience really a racially queer experience?

A queer consideration of the psychoanalytic literature on race reveals unexamined and embedded disciplinary assumptions. When racial multiplicity is addressed, it is continually framed in binary, polarized splits, rather than as a messy, variable, and multiplicitous whole. The few analytic articles that include a mixed-race subject continue to frame the experience of race as made up of distinct, homogenous parts—for example, half-Black, quarter-White—as though such demarcations are possible. And there is the cultural stereotype of the melancholic mulatto, dysphoric and upended as a result of being caught between two racial worlds (Nakashima, 1992). It is an image evoked still in present day (Bonovitz, 2009).

Writing about trans experience, Keenan (2017) suggests trans identities are paradoxical because they simultaneously encompass "institutional invisibility and social hypervisibility" (p. 539). These dynamics of erasure coupled with intense regulation are well-known to multiracials in the United States. "For those of us who do not easily fit into the anatomically based state definitions of male and female," Keenan (2017) writes, "our genders can be visibly outlawed in the act of producing identifications" (p. 550). As racial outlaws with illegible racial identities, mixed-race individuals have also been subject to especially close policing (Brubaker, 2016; Hansbury, 2017). Institutional policies prohibit or severely limit embodiment and consideration of racial multiplicity. Meanwhile, racial multiplicity is psychologically outlawed through dissociative processes.

Psychoanalysts using trans frameworks (Gherovici, 2010, 2017; Hansbury, 2011, 2017; Saketopoulou, 2017) further expand queer discourse to engage unstable and unsettled identities—those identities that exist on the margins. They challenge us to reconsider our notions of boundaries, wholeness, cohesion, and integration, doing what sociologist Rogers Brubaker (2016) calls thinking "with" trans rather than simply thinking "about" trans (p. 71).

In his award-winning and groundbreaking paper, "The Masculine Vaginal: Working with Queer Men's Embodiment at the Transgender Edge," Hansbury (2017) elaborates his concept of "transmodern," which he defines as "a post-postmodern stance in which 'both/neither' takes center stage." He goes on to explain: "When used alone, both the binary and the multiplicity models are insufficient because they set up a false dichotomy" (Hansbury, 2017, p. 1015).

Here Hansbury (2017) provides one of the most useful and profound contemporary frameworks for thinking about racial multiplicity. Rather than taking a both/and position, which only further entrenches the binary (one must be both Black and White), he opens a "both/neither" space (one is both Black and White, and neither Black nor White). Mapped onto race, the multiracial person is no longer confined to a monoracial classification system, but can at once be both/many races and neither/none of them.

This way of thinking and working requires us, as clinicians, to not hold or hew too tightly to our theories and norms, but to find ways to offer and be open to new "translational frameworks" (Saketopoulou, 2017, p. 1035). We are required to tolerate the anxiety—our patients' and our own—that may emerge as identities and psyches are unsettled.

What, then, are the possibilities in moving beyond more binary analytic theories and constructions that suggest we are looking to cohere, solidify, or bind our anxiety? What are the anxieties aroused in this unsettling—the unsettling in the unsettling? And what might, instead, be found, or created, in this unbinding, in the fractures—the places where we are not whole, but are split, as Freud himself anticipated?

Clinical considerations

In order to be open to whatever variation of racial experiences our multiracial patients bring into the room, we offer some of the questions that we might ask ourselves at the outset of a treatment:

- What does it mean for this patient and this treatment to be working with, for example, a light-skinned, blonde, mixed-race Mexican woman?
- How are mixed-race dynamics entering—or not fully entering—the room? For example, what part or parts of the self can be known and loved in the treatment? What parts of identity are foregrounded? What parts must be split off or dissociated? And what parts might be consciously erased?
- How are this patient's identities and identifications chosen? Are they chosen at a societal level? Within the family? Who in the family does this mixed-race patient identify with? One parent or the other? Both parents? Neither? And where does self-identification fit in?
- In treating our mixed-race patients we also recommend being mindful of the following: What is being dissociated—both within and outside of the therapeutic dyad? Are we considering psyche and soma: the body, sexuality, sexualization? What is being pulled for in the transference: Is there a reduction or fixation on race or on only one part of racial identity? Are we attending to countertransference: What might we not be seeing, be overlooking, or collapsing?

- Are we allowing for a complication of the narrative and for narrative shifts? Rather than looking simply to cohere and integrate, are we allowing for meaning to emerge in splits, fractures, disconnects, and estrangements—the way Freud and psychoanalysis would expect us to?

Clinical vignette

In the expansive clinical literature, it is rare to hear patients' own reflections in their own words. The writings of Hassinger (2014) and Seeley (2000) alter the clinical possibilities through accounts that allow us to hear directly from patients. Canadian analyst DeYoung (2015) writes from a perspective perhaps rarer still: her own experience as a patient. Given the lack of clinical writing about the mixed-race experience, we wonder if our experiences, not only as mixed-race therapists but also as mixed-race patients, might provide important contributions to a nearly barren landscape.

Writing from her experience on the other side of the couch, Alexandra offers a unique vantage from which to explore dynamics of racial multiplicity. As clinicians, we believe that "identity as we know it has changed only when people have broken down previously held truths by sharing their own complex embodied experiences" (Keenan, 2017, p. 552). Admittedly, one concern may be that such accounts are unique to the individual and are not representative of larger themes. While true that Alexandra's experience will always be subjective and incomplete, it cannot be divorced from larger cultural and psychological considerations. Taking a cue from Yi (2014a) and Bromberg (1996), we agree that to divorce these aspects of self—the mixed-race psychotherapist from the mixed-race psychotherapy patient—walls off important avenues of meaning from our emotional-cultural worlds. As such, in our clinical examples, we believe in attempting to "stand in the spaces" as both psychotherapists and psychotherapy patients.

Alexandra: "What's in a name?"

In college, I sought therapy from a skilled, kind woman named E. I valued her. She had a good sense of humor and was thoughtful. One session, E. apologized and informed me that she would have to leave the phone out. Her daughter was sick and she was waiting for a call from the school about whether E. needed to pick her up. I responded to this disclosure with a slew of questions. A sick child? Was she okay? Where was the school? Was E. married? To a man? E. shared that she was straight, married to a man, they were Jewish, and sent their daughter to a nearby Jewish day school.

The disclosures that afternoon made stark the differences between E. and me. Prior to this, I had been submerged in a fantasy of sameness. Curiously, dynamics of difference began to constellate and converge around

religious, ethnic, and racial identities. For the first time, we began to talk explicitly about race and the racial difference that existed between us. E. was White, ethnically Jewish, and monoracial. Although I can't speak to the inevitable complications and nuances of her process, E. told me that she identified with being Jewish, it was a term she felt confident in calling her own and used it to communicate something about who she was. In my fantasy, I imagined E.'s household as lacking discordance and discrepancy. She, her husband, and her child all embraced the coziness and security of knowing they belonged to a shared heritage. All of this felt in significant contrast to my brown, multiracial, multicultural mix. Moreover, part of my lineage is Muslim and ethnically Pakistani. I worried about how these identities, seemingly ripe for splitting, projection, and othering, would connect, contact, and engage.

A few months later, E. told me she was going to a training out of state and asked if she could present some of our work together. Informed that I would be disguised, I consented and asked, excitedly,

A: "What will you name me?"

E: "How about … Yael?"

A: [Pausing] "No … I don't think so."

E: "Why not?"

A: "I don't know … ."

This was met with a loaded silence. I couldn't see E., but I could sense that what I had said had caused her to bristle. The dynamic between us was tense and uncertain. E. shared that she was having some difficulty, wondering if I didn't like the name because it was Jewish. I was horrified, instantly denied this, and apologized. I was awash in shame that something I had done could be questioned or felt as anti-Semitic. I felt despicable.

What I didn't speak to, and what I couldn't access until later, were the other feelings regarding why the name didn't feel right. I was resisting the pull to frame my experience like hers. I did not feel as culturally identifiable as that name presupposed. My experience of racial multiplicity seemed to defy such a prescriptive category and existed in a state of constant flux. I was disappointed, unsettled, aware that I, too, was making assumptions about her heritage and cultural homogeneity. Yet I had no idea how to get out of this muck, how to proceed through such murky waters.

Embedded in mixed-race experience is such a dialectical tension. An engagement with racial multiplicity, variability, and fluidity suggests that at a moment of recognition and identification, there is simultaneously an experience of misrecognition, a doing/undoing, the both/neither. Part of the cultural dissociation is to overlook this tension in favor of more stable

and fixed understandings of race. Such frames are consistent with how cultural, political, and social institutions construe and conceptualize aspects of self and other. Adhering to such models may keep things "tidy" (Bushra, 2009), but at the cost of knowing another reality. Cultural dissociation avoids such considerations, as well as the feelings of overwhelm, anger, and unsettling that can come from such disruption. Racial multiplicity, however, may require one to hold steady in such queer moments, moments that upend, transgress, and feel discordant, in order to step into more expansive and inclusive terrain.

I was embarrassed and nervous. She tried again.

E: "Hmmm … well, if Yael doesn't fit … how about Ayesha?"

A: "Okay."

This was a lie. All the qualms I felt about Yael, the seeming singularity and intelligibility of the experience, applied to Ayesha. I agreed because I wanted to end the discussion.

Over the years, I have returned to this moment. It still evokes some shame and, even now, I am apprehensive to include it here. Regretfully, no one, including me, goes through this world escaping the perniciousness of bias. Yet attributing my rejection of Yael to it being a Jewish name feels erroneous. I am deeply touched that E. wanted to call me something that was linked to elements beloved by her. I cared deeply for her, and she let me know the feelings were mutual. I also felt misrecognized. As I began to explore both my own embodied experience and the theoretical underpinnings of racial multiplicity, I came to wonder if this moment reflected the anxiety, tension, and incomprehension that comes from contact with mixed-race experience. My question, "What will you call me?," was a way of asking E. how she saw and knew my experience of multiplicity. My disappointment came when I sensed that this hadn't been grasped. At the time, I felt that both names failed to convey an understanding of my experience of fluidity, mutability, and cohesion, the subjective experience of embodying and living the both/neither. Her communication seemed to be that, in order to be legible and understood, certain aspects of my experience had to be edited and avoided. For me, this was incomplete and, for a moment, I rejected such erasure. My response, although perhaps lacking tact, was a refusal to construct my experience in singular and locatable terms. In the world where I was called Ayesha, I was seen solely as brown, an erasure of my connection to my mother. When named Yael, I felt that I was being viewed as White, and disloyal to my father. Neither of these categories fully contained my reality, and I wanted something else.

I shared none of this with E. I felt guilty and didn't want to be "difficult." Instead, I acquiesced, opting to accommodate rather than

navigate something that felt relationally treacherous. I wonder what the experience evoked in E. Did she feel defensive about her own understanding of race? Of herself? Of her cultural identity? Even though our therapy would continue, this moment was never discussed nor returned to. This silence is indicative of the powerful avoidance that surrounds considerations of racial multiplicity, the shame of misrecognition, and the difficulty in holding variability and fluidity. Sometimes I feel saddened by my willingness to erase my complicated realities to protect my connection to E. I think of how it felt better to avoid this, to be misrecognized, misunderstood, to remain hidden, and ultimately, a bit unknown, all of which I was complicit in, rather than insist we stay in the unsettling, treacherous intensity of a queer moment. In my fantasy, if we were to do it over, I imagine us playing. Perhaps when I asked her, she could then ask me. We'd take turns and co-create, through dialogue and not knowing, a new understanding. "I dunno, Alexandra." I imagine her laughing "What *should* I call you?"

Conclusion

From whence do we come? As we write, the nation is at a standstill over an impasse, ostensibly about a wall. There are those who believe that such an edifice can delineate a border. Yet, race—beholden to a less rigid logic, in which clear demarcations between the self and other are harder to define—teaches us that such walls are illusory.

The history of the United States is a history of efforts to obfuscate and erase such slippery realities. In turn, racial multiplicity has been ignored and outlawed. Rather than tangle with a real engagement with racial multiplicity, we have defaulted to cultural dissociation to blot out the overwhelm, uncertainty, dislocation, anxiety, and fear that are evoked by mixed-race subjectivities.

Although psychoanalysis has taken up race as a topic, the field has, to paraphrase González, failed to do its own analytic work. As a result, the psychoanalytic literature on race replicates our country's cultural dissociation of racial multiplicity. This avoidance confoundingly continues, even as U.S. demographics suggest that mixed-race subjectivities and the mixed-race experience are an ever more present reality in our living rooms and in our consulting rooms. Yet if we are better able to understand our inheritance and know whence our discipline came, it becomes possible to alter the way that we work with the panoply of racial experiences that walk into our rooms. We have the chance to reexamine assumptions, deepen our understandings, and attend to certain blind spots and enactments.

Queer theory's departure from binary categorizations and essentializing narratives provides a theoretical frame with which to explore the subjective experience of race as fluid, constructed, and multiple. This perspective might also allow us to consider not only the challenges of such an experience, but also its strengths and ingenuity.

We would suggest that it is equally, and perhaps even most, important for analysts to examine their own racial realities and complicated histories—in order to know whence each of us came. What was constructed in the narrative about your race: how did it come to be? Racial multiplicity requires us to upend, complicate, reflect, and reexamine the assumptions we have made about race and our deeply internalized cultural preference for monoracial conceptualizations—and perhaps more binary analytic theories.

As clinicians, it is necessary to explore whether we are creating new structures for understanding and allowing for new translations. Or, if not, in what ways do we avoid, modify, or mollify mixed-race experience? This requires us to listen, to attend to our own internal splits, to tolerate the complication, disorientation, and the unknown. Rather than build walls, we must make more space.

Note

1. It is worth noting that while Strachey translates "mischlingen" as "individual of mixed race," elsewhere it is translated as "human half-breeds," hybrid," or "mongrel."

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