

Margin of Error: Navigating Educational Settings as a Bi/Multicultural Student

Student Researcher: Aubrey Felty, Department of Theatre Arts

CREATIVE GOAL

As a Theatre Education major, I am interested in creating a devised theatre piece focused on the lived experiences of multicultural individuals, which I define as persons who self-identify with more than one culture and/or ethnic group. I will facilitate a space and experience that will amplify voices that are systematically silenced. I will utilize theatre as a transformative medium to share how social constructs affect racially heterogeneous individuals. The purpose of this project is to create a devised theatre performance by and about multicultural individuals.

Devising is a subgroup of the larger genre, Applied Theatre, which intends to promote social change through theatre. In this form, “the audience is challenged to explore multiple possibilities within a given oppressive situation, and to actively engage in the theatrical process to attempt to overcome that oppression” (Boal as cited in Mesner, 2018, p. 256).

The specific goals of this project are to:

- Elevate the voices of bi/multicultural students.
- Provide space for bi/multicultural individuals to discuss and share their stories.
- Promote a better understanding of bi/multicultural people.

The research questions that I would like to investigate are as follows:

1. How do bi/multicultural individuals perform their self-identity in different social contexts?
2. Do bi/multicultural individuals feel obligated to perform particular racial identities, or aspects of those identities, to perform? Why or why not?
3. How do university demographics affect bi/multicultural individuals’ educational experiences?

SIGNIFICANCE

As the number of multicultural students rises, schools must reevaluate their initial single-race approach to curriculum. Multicultural individuals often feel alienated in society. Educators are called upon to work towards acknowledging the shortcomings of traditional practices. Wardel (2000) states:

Although many school books and classes include contributions by all the diverse groups of people... there is no evidence of the existence and contributions of people of mixed racial and ethnic heritage.

Additionally, bi/multicultural students often lack communities. Many race-oriented student services in schools cater to monocultural groups. Ingram et. al. (2014) recommend that colleges offer more supportive services for bi/multicultural students.

Conscious or not, racial microaggressions and stereotypes litter educational institutions. Aurora Chang-Ross (2010) retells her experience being dissected solely for her name. Stereotypes are often coupled with academic expectations (i.e. Asian individuals excelling in mathematics). She was encouraged to change her appearance to better fit the cultural standards of beauty. Multicultural people find that they are often “othered.” Chang-Ross proposes that her academic

position can be a platform to emerge and heighten awareness. How do we use the platform and creative outlets we are given to activate this?

Applied theatre requires a careful approach because there is a gray area in staging personal experiences. An autoethnography study was conducted “by asking people of color to share their narratives of racism in the presence of Whites, teachers, facilitators, and diversity trainers” (Wahab & Gibson 2007). Researchers found that these dialogues continue to privilege the White community often at the expense of people of color. Biracial subjects in the study felt the need to rationalize their vulnerability and were obligated to voice their trauma. This is a factor that we must keep at the forefront of our minds. While this process can be therapeutic for many, it is not therapy by any means. We must be respectful to ourselves and our participants throughout this process.

It is clear that we as a society must confront our shortcomings and recognize that underrepresentation and the use of microaggressions alienate multicultural individuals. Multicultural people may experience marginalization due to their physical appearance and sometimes experience hostility when attempting to associate themselves with a monoracial community.

METHODOLOGY

Phase 1: Interviews and Data Collection

Research Team

In addition to myself, my research team for this project will include research assistants with experience in devised and applied theatre (primarily drawn from USU’s Theatre Education & Applied Theatre Programs). We will work closely with Dr. Matt Omasta, who is serving as a mentor for this project. All RAs will complete CITI training as required by the University, including training in maintaining the confidentiality of participants, etc. [RA's involvement in the project is described in the appropriate sections below.]

Participant Recruitment

We will identify and recruit participants interested in contributing to this project. I will reach out to campus organizations concerned with multicultural issues (e.g., the Access and Diversity Center, SCED 3210: Multicultural Foundations) to advertise and recruit. We will use recruitment materials to explain and invite people to participate in the project.

Participants will be able to work with the project in multiple ways. (1) They may be interviewed and share their stories without performing in the theatre piece, (2) they may participate in the theatre piece without being interviewed, or (3) they may both participate in the interviews and the performance. The participants who choose to be involved in the creation of the play (regardless of whether they are interviewed) will become members of the devising team, in addition to myself and the research team. *Participants in the project will NOT be members of the research team in that they will not conduct or transcribe interviews. They will not be aware of the identities of participants interviewed (they will only view data using pseudonyms) and will not have access to any research documents other than the interview transcripts (with pseudonyms).*

If too few participants can be fully involved, the researchers have backup measures in place. Should we not find enough participants to interview, we will reach out to organizations outside of Utah State University. If there are not enough performers, we will reach out to artists across the nation to participate through video recording. The researchers will be transparent in all written materials and pre-show talks about the way materials were gathered and the fact that some people may be sharing stories that are not their own.

Interviews

Researchers will conduct the interviews with participants. All interviews will be audio-recorded, but these recordings will be destroyed after the interviews are transcribed (during the process of which, participants will be assigned pseudonyms).

Given the nature of such interviews, each may be unique as they follow the trajectory participants take them on. However, the standard interview protocol is described below.

First, participants will complete a demographic form in which they indicate (if comfortable doing so) their age, gender identity, sexual identity, romantic identity, race/ethnicity, education level, profession, marital or domestic relationship status, and if they desire to share any information regarding their levels of ability/disability. The researcher will assign a participant ID number to be included on this form. The researcher will also state the participant ID number at the beginning of the interview so that the demographic forms can be linked to participants.

Second, participants will participate in an in-person or virtual interview using the questions below. The interview process should take about 20-30 minutes.

1. How do you identify in terms of race and ethnicity?
 - a. Do you identify more with some aspects of your racial identity more than others?
2. Are there circumstances in which you change how you identify racially?
 - a. Please explain.
3. How does your racial identity intersect with other aspects of your identity (such as age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)?
4. Can you tell me about a time where you were conscious of being bi/multiracial?
5. What about your racial identity do you wish others knew?
6. What are the racial demographics of your college/university community?
 - a. How do your college's racial demographics affect your experience as a student?
7. What role, if any, do racial stereotypes play in your everyday encounters with others?
8. Researchers have defined microaggressions as "a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group" (Merriam-Webster 2020). Have you ever experienced microaggressions?
 - a. Please give me an example.
9. Has your college experience thus far made you rethink or change how you identify racially?
 - a. How so?

Transcription and Condensation

Each interview will be transcribed fully. Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcript of their interviews and to strike any portion of the interview that they do not wish to be disclosed to the devising team for potential inclusion in the play. Once participants have reviewed their transcripts, the transcripts will be condensed (see Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, pp. 117-120). The condensed interviews will serve as the data corpus from which the devised theatre piece will draw from (see next sections).

Phase 2: Performance Devising

Script Writing

The devising team will review all interview materials and transcripts. The group will then discuss the material, identifying potential themes and recurring topics. The script will include monologues, realistic and abstract scenes, moments of direct address, movement pieces, and/or other content that builds the project's artistic credibility with the goal of sharing information about the participants' lived experiences.

Rehearsal

The rehearsal period is expected to consist of approximately six 2-hour rehearsals via Zoom. In all cases, participants will have the option to perform their own story or have another performer tell it. Therefore, while all of the stories told in the piece will be derived from interviews with the participants, the performers telling the stories may or may not have originally contributed the material.

Performance/Video

The goal is to create a digital piece (using the completed script) that will be released on various social media platforms. It is my hope that through this medium, the piece will be able to reach a wider audience.

OUTPUTS

The final product will be in three parts: (1) the completed script, (2) a video, and (3) a reflective writing piece.

REFERENCES

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CCA Summer Arts Research 2021 Personal Statement

Margin of Error: Navigating Higher Education as a Bi/Multicultural Student is a project that is extremely important to me, and I believe that it has the potential to resonate with many university students across the nation. I have worked with my mentor, Dr. Matt Omasta, since the Fall 2020 semester to create a strong foundation for this creative research project. Over the next several months, I will be working with my research team to interview participants, transcribe, and develop a devised theatre script. I hope to sharpen my skills in devised theatre work through coding transcriptions and compiling an original theatre piece made for bi/multicultural students like me.

Upon graduation from the Theatre Education program at Utah State University, I plan to return to my hometown in Texas to teach secondary theatre, although I would love the opportunity to work in Applied Theatre at some point in my career. I am looking forward to utilizing my experiences in Applied Theatre to educate and uplift the voices of my future students. I believe that the skills that I have gained in participating in this work will be crucial elements of my practices as an arts educator. I am looking into pursuing an MFA in Theatre Education after at least a few years of teaching.

I am thrilled to be applying for this fellowship and realize the gravity that this program holds. It still stuns me when I think about getting to engage in this type of work as an undergraduate student. I have only begun my project, but I have learned much more than I could have hoped. This fellowship will ensure that I will be prepared and confident to fulfill the remaining operations of my project. My plans are to work on script development over the summer, so I would be spending the fellowship working on coding the script, compiling the script, and holding workshops to revise and polish the piece.

As I prepare for my fourth and final year in the Theatre Education program, I will be student teaching and starting my professional career throughout the next year. If I were granted the opportunity to participate in this fellowship, I would be able to give my full attention to the development of my project as well as my studies as I venture into my professional career. As I stated above, I will be moving back to Texas when I graduate and I must tend to the financial demands that that will entail. I also hope to travel and present my research at Theatre Education conferences like the American Alliance for Theatre & Education. In doing so, I will have the opportunity to not only share my work but raise awareness of a community that often goes unacknowledged. For all of these reasons, an opportunity like this would truly impact the way I approach these next steps in my work and life. Thank you so much for your consideration.