I’VE GOT A STORY TO TELL: CRITICAL RACE THEORY, WHITENESS AND NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC CENSUS CATEGORIES

Candice J. LeFlore-Muñoz

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2010

Committee:

Radhika Gajjala, Advisor

Charles Kanwischer
Graduate Faculty Representative

Michael Butterworth

Lynda Dixon
ABSTRACT

Dr. Radhika Gajjala, Advisor

This study examines the embedded nature of whiteness in the use of racial and ethnic categories on U.S. census forms. Specifically, this study focuses on people’s perceptions of racial and ethnic categories, how those categories have been historically used on U.S. census forms, and the relationship between this discourse on racial and ethnic categories and elements of whiteness. Like (Nobles, 2000), in this study, I argue that the rhetorical construction of race and ethnicity on census forms is not a trivial matter since the way that we structure these words and categories significantly influences how we understand them. Thus, this study practices critical rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989) and employs the use of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefanić, 2001) to investigate the relationship between the 20 counter narratives and the larger master narrative about racial and ethnic categorization in this country. Throughout this dissertation, I use Omi and Winant’s (1994) racial formation and racial projects to highlight several themes that emerge in the master narrative and counter narratives. By focusing on these themes, this analysis explores past, present, and future racial projects that may emerge in relation to the use of racial and ethnic categories on census forms and elements of whiteness.
For my family - past, present, and future.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Upon finally completing this dissertation, I can only say that I know that I did not complete this project in my own strength because there were many times when I had to rely on my faith in God to help guide my path. In light of this, I simply have more people to thank than there are words to express because so many people came to my rescue with prayers, support, and encouraging words along the way. Specifically, I want to thank my husband Ricardo and daughter Gabriela whose smiles and laughter helped me keep my priorities in order. They offered numerous “acts of love” in their own special ways and offered unwavering support which pushed me along when I felt overwhelmed.

Additionally, this project would not be in front of you if it were not for our parents - Amelia, Mary (Mrs. Muñoz), and Richard (Mr. Muñoz) – who recognized the need for me to have uninterrupted time to work and consistently created that space for me. I also have to thank my siblings Quentin and Carmelita who were there for me during the all the hills and valleys along the way. Aside from that, I want to thank the rest of my family (you know who you are - and you know that there are way too many of you to name) who pitched in with long conversations, family meals, and general support.

This project is a reflection of a culmination of conversations that I’ve had with a variety of teachers, friends, mentors, and classmates over a 10 year time period. I want to thank Tendaji and everyone at the Educational Opportunities Initiative (EOI) office at the University of Michigan-Flint because they helped with my early exploration of these ideas through the Interracial Communications Project. Additionally, I want to thank several other classmates and friends for their random intellectual conversations, guiding support, and advice. DaKysha, Renata, Phyllis, Sue Ellen, & Mika, thanks for laying the
groundwork and guiding me along the road to a finished dissertation. Christie, Toni, Anca, Cheryl, and Shellae, thanks for the love and all the individual things (small and large) that you did along the way to help me get to this point.

Given my interest, I want to end with thanking my advisor Dr. Gajjala and my committee members because without them, this project would still be a bunch of random thoughts running through my head. I am thankful that in their own individual ways, they helped me take this project to another level by showing me how to sculpt my interests into useful academic scholarship. Dr. Gajjala, your insight, humor, and dedication have not gone unnoticed. Your ability to teach us how to be critical, while letting us find our own way is a rare gift that is priceless. Dr. Butterworth, I will always appreciate that you ask the hard questions because they have provided a strong foundation for my intellectual growth. Dr. Dixon, I am thankful for the many things that you helped me with along the way and for all of the conversations that we’ve had during this journey. I also want to thank Dr. Kanswisher, my graduate faculty representative because he offered a fresh perspective during this process and helped to reassure me that my writing was beneficial and easy to understand.

So, like the West African (Ghananian) Sankofa bird, I have not been able to move forward without looking back at all of the people who have helped me along the way. So, to them and everyone else who offered kind words along the way, I am truly thankful!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unveiling Whiteness in Discourse</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Breakdown</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE: EXPLORING RACE AND ETHNICITY THROUGH THE LENS OF WHITENESS</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muddled Memories of a Multiracial Past</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situating Race and Ethnicity within Whiteness Studies and Critical Rhetoric</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness Studies: An Overview of Scholarship</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO: PAST TO PRESENT – TRACES OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC CATEGORIZATION</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Racial Classification Systems</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race as a Biological Construction</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race as a Social Construction</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race, Power, and Dominance</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND THE U.S. CENSUS</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upholding Whiteness: Racial and Ethnic Classification on the U.S. Census</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identification and <em>Official</em> Racial and Ethnic Categories</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check ONE Box: Monoracial Ideology and the U.S. Census</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypodescent Racial Projects and Census Classification</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining the Rigid Color Line: Anti-Miscegenation Laws and the U.S. Census</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free White Persons: Intersections of Citizenship, Whiteness, and the Census</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark One or More: Census 2000</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: CRT AND THE PRACTICE OF A CRITICAL RHETORIC</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory (CRT)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Rhetoric</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismantling Power: Complimentary Aspects of Critical Rhetoric and CRT</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling Whose Stories: Data Collection and Study Design</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: THE MASTER NARRATIVE</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box Checking and Socialization</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box Checking and Self-Identity/Self-Esteem</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Race and Ethnicity</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well…What are You? Stereotyping, Social Rules, and Racial/Ethnic Categories</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX: COUNTER NARRATIVES, CATEGORIES, AND PRIVILEGE: HOW WHITENESS WORKS WITH BOX CHECKING</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privilege, Passing, and Box Checking</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The White Category and Privilege</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Categories and Privilege</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing for Privilege</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin Color and Privilege</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN: SHATTERING THE PAST: CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE MASTER NARRATIVE</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Race…What Space?</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boxes Not Inclusive</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Groups – No Hyphen American</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and National Identity</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boxes Not Inclusive for Whites</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Boxes Not Inclusive for Latinos…………………………………. 153
Wording & the Use of Negro………………………………………… 158

CHAPTER EIGHT: PRESERVING AND DISMANTLING THE AUTHORITY OF WHITENESS ……………………………………………………………………………………………………… 161
Self-Identification, Public Policy, and Civil Rights Legislation……………… 163
The Black/White Binary and Some Other Race…………………………….. 170
Possibilities for Change…………………………………………………… 172
Color Blindness…………………………………………………………….. 173
Honorary Whites and Collective Blacks……………………………………… 176
White Minority or White Majority? ………………………………………… 182
Whiteness Deconstructed ………………………………………………… 185
Boxes Not Inclusive …………………………………………………………… 186
Considerations for the Future………………………………………………… 193
What Can Reasonably be Done? …………………………………………… 196
Reducing Skepticism & Promoting Intersectionality………………………… 197
Limitations & Future Research……………………………………………… 204

REFERENCES……………………………………………………………………………… 208

APPENDIX A: LIST OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS …………………………………… 227
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER ……………………………………………… 228
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM …………………………………………………… 229
APPENDIX D: NARRATIVE PROMPT ……………………………………………… 230
APPENDIX E: CENSUS QUESTIONS HANDOUT ……………………………….. 232
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS…………………………………………. 235
I’VE GOT A STORY TO TELL: CRITICAL RACE THEORY, WHITENESS AND NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC CENSUS CATEGORIES

Introduction

Wondering...

1st grade: Wondering why my mom calls my light-skinned aunt Black, when I think she looks more White. 3rd grade: Wondering why Black and Native American are not considered mixed...wondering why my father is called Black when he is Native American too...

Acknowledging and Believing...

6th grade: Mutually acknowledging with one of my best friends from 1st grade (who is a White-appearing blond-haired, blue-eyed Native American boy) that we shouldn’t hang around each other because now the kids at school tend to hang out with the people who look like them and we are tired of getting teased. Middle school: Believing the one-drop rule...or that if you are anything mixed with Black, you are just Black. High school: Acknowledging that there are five “official” racial and ethnic categories - White, Black, Asian, Native American, and Latino. Knowing that White always comes first, but not fully understanding why...wondering why it is so easy for me to just say the five categories when there are other racial and ethnic categories out there.

Wondering and Questioning...

College: Being happy about the new Black golfer Tiger Woods even though he doesn’t describe himself as Black, but as multiracial. Wondering why he has to just be Black? Grad School: Being skeptical about all of the media referring to the new president (Barack Obama) as the first Black president...again because he is multiracial...then realizing that he refers to himself as Black. Questioning the very racial and ethnic categories that have framed so much of my life.
Since the first census in 1790, the United States has been a country that is obsessed with labels and the use of racial and ethnic categories. These labels have become a fundamental part of how individuals view the world, and they play a significant role in how reality is constructed. Whether a person identifies as Black or African American, Latina or Hispanic, Asian or Chinese American, these words have roots of significance far beyond the words that appear on the page. These labels carry their historical significance with them every time they are uttered, written, or seen on a page. Thus, given the fact that racial and ethnic labels enjoy widespread use, these terms are important in society and they become a central factor in how individuals craft their identity (Yanow, 2003).

Despite the fact that centuries of scientific research on race has yielded no biological or empirical proof, every day contemporary discourse “creates, maintains, and reifies concepts and categories of race and ethnicity” (Yanow, 2003, p. viii). In light of this, despite the acknowledgment of a lack of biological proof, the social and political use of racial and ethnic categories has become ingrained in U.S. culture and these categories are currently viewed as a normal part of our everyday existence. The racial and ethnic labels that are used on many of the forms that are seen today continue to reflect the impact of the United States’ colonial past and the construction of race by those who had the power to define it (Fanon, 1967; Asante, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993; Orbe & Harris, 2001).

As Delgado and Stefanic (2000) point out, these words reveal the nature of social construction since “our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories, and silence” (p. xvii). Therefore, in order to move toward a more inclusive understanding of racial/ethnic signifiers in this country, people must first recognize how issues of power and privilege are represented in the labels that
are faced every day, and how power and privilege are embedded in the labels that people chose to describe themselves and others.

In light of this, the primary motivation for this study stems from the need to gather a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which racial and ethnic categories have been constructed in this country, and the ways that they have been constructed around elements of whiteness. The United States’ current struggles regarding the legacy of its perceptions of race as mono-racial and static, along with the growing tension surrounding the perception of a multiracial future, point to the need to explore this ideological shift.

Given the U.S. Census Bureau’s decision to move toward allowing individuals to Mark One or More racial category (i.e., the MOOM option) on the 2000 census, this dissertation focuses on the use of racial and ethnic categories on census forms and people’s perceptions about them. While the use of racial and ethnic categories on U.S. census forms appears to be largely unimportant, the guidelines surrounding the categorizations of race and ethnicity has monumental consequences for questions of identity formation, political decisions, and societal understanding. Racial and ethnic categorization on census forms impact the data that is used by various institutions and agencies for matters of employment, housing, funding (at the local, state, and federal level) and how elections are organized (Omi & Winant, 1994).

In light of this, while many people think of the census as an objective entity that merely counts race, I argue that it also plays a fundamental role in the way that race is shaped and categorized since the official categories that are used on census forms often influence the racial and ethnic categories that are used on other forms (e.g., for employment, education, recreation, etc.). Thus, I contend that racial and ethnic labels are not categories that are simply described by language; they are categories that are created through language and through the institutional
practices (like census taking) that support them (Nobles, 2000). Furthermore, I argue that the rhetorical construction of race and ethnicity on census forms is not a trivial matter, since the way we structure the words and categories surrounding race and ethnicity significantly influences how they are understood.

Given the importance of focusing on the use of racial and ethnic discourse, this dissertation focuses on people’s perceptions of racial and ethnic categories, how those categories have been historically used on U.S. census forms, and the relationship between this discourse on racial and ethnic categories and elements of whiteness. This analysis is informed by Omi and Winant’s (1994) discussion of racial formation and racial projects. Additionally, this analysis uses critical race theory (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993) and the practice of a critical rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989, 1991, 2001) to look at how individual narratives about racial and ethnic labels are related to the construction and categorization of race and ethnicity on the 1990 and 2000 U.S. census forms. Lastly, this analysis seeks to identify whether elements of whiteness are visible in people’s narratives about racial and ethnic categories.

Critical race theory is used for this analysis due to its inherent focus on legal discourse, power, and race. Likewise, critical rhetoric is utilized due to its focus on revealing the power/knowledge dynamic in society and seeking to unmask the discourse of power. As a result, through the use of both critical race theory and critical rhetoric, this analysis offers insight into how legal constructions of race and ethnicity have historically made the mutually exclusive racial/ethnic choices (i.e., “check only one box”) seem like a normal reflection of identity choices, when in reality they are not. Furthermore, through their focus on power and dominance, these frameworks allow individual stories to be heard, while helping to point out the many ways that
assumptions of White superiority are ingrained in our social, political, and legal discourse about race and ethnicity.

While using critical race theory and a critical rhetoric perspective, I collected and analyzed twenty individual narratives about people’s experiences and perceptions of the racial and ethnic categories used on the 1990 and 2000 census forms. These narratives were collected through a two-part framework that allowed individuals to first tell their story about their experiences and perceptions of racial and ethnic categories, and then participate in an in-depth interview that focused on their stories and the 1990 and 2000 census questions on race and ethnicity.

Storytelling (also called *counter narratives* or *counter stories*) was used as a collection method due to its emphasis in critical race theory. For example, Delgado and Stefanic (2001) describe the use of storytelling in critical race theory as “writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity or accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144). In light of this, the individual narratives (i.e., counter narratives) that I collected serve as a way to explore the *master narrative* that has been historically constructed on U.S. census forms about racial and ethnic categories. As a result, this study explores several guiding questions. These questions include: (1) how are individual narratives of race and ethnicity related to the construction and categorization of race and ethnicity on U.S. census forms?, (2) how (if at all) are elements of whiteness visible in people’s narratives about racial and ethnic categories?, (3) how are racial and ethnic categories constructed in the master narrative of the U.S. Census Bureau?, and (4) how does the discussion of race in the master narrative and counter narratives preserve the authority of whiteness (if at all)?
Unveiling Whiteness in Discourse

Several rhetorical scholars (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Crenshaw, 1997; Kennedy, Middleton & Ratcliff, 2005) recognize and make a call for the need to address elements of whiteness and the way that it functions in discourse. For example, Crenshaw (1997) argues that rhetoricians need to be involved in the critical ideological work that is necessary “to make whiteness visible and overturn its silences for the purpose of resisting racism” (p. 254). Additionally, Nakayama and Krizek (1995) and Kennedy, Middleton and Ratcliff (2005) discuss how whiteness needs to be viewed as a rhetorical construction, and how those who work in areas like rhetoric, composition, and cultural language use need to explore how whiteness reproduces itself as a neutral, normal, unmarked, visible and invisible category.

More specifically, Johnson (1999) discusses the importance of studying whiteness from a communication perspective due to its focus on how meaning gets made. In light of this, he argues that:

Understanding these larger social discourses means that the challenge of whiteness studies lies not in any individual attempting to change her or his communication patterns; rather we need to understand the ways that communication about whiteness is embedded in our social fabric. (Johnson, 1999, p. 5)

This dissertation seeks to address the role of whiteness in the everyday discourse of racial and ethnic categorization systems. It adds to the current research on whiteness and rhetoric by answering the call to analyze how whiteness is reproduced as an invisible/visible neutral category which exerts influence on everyday life through the use of racial and ethnic categorization systems. Furthermore, this dissertation contributes to current literature by
offering an analysis of whiteness that focuses on categorization systems which are embedded in social, legal, political, and personal conversations about race and ethnicity.

Every time people fill out a form that asks for their racial and ethnic identity, they are faced with the remnants of governmental classification systems that first appeared on the census over two centuries ago. This project seeks to disrupt the notion that the Census Bureau merely collects data and plays no role in the way that racial and ethnic categories are constructed (Nobles, 2000). It disrupts that notion by inquiring about the ways in which whiteness has been embedded in the Census Bureau’s use of racial and ethnic categories. Furthermore, this dissertation seeks to make an important contribution to understanding the perceptions about the way that race and ethnicity is classified on census forms since racial and ethnic classification systems continue to be both symbolic and culturally significant in our society. As Robbin (2000) highlights, these classification systems are culturally significant because they reproduce “historical and current ideological thought, institutional power, and the contested terrain of social relations” (p. 399).

As a result, the impact of this discourse does not just happen every ten years when the census is taken; it happens every time those categories are seen or heard. In light of this, it is crucial to understand their influence on how people assemble their perceptions of racial and ethnic categories and to identify whether or not they emerge in ways that uphold notions of whiteness. By focusing on the way in which these perceptions are constructed, this dissertation seeks to provide additional insight into how these categories can be deconstructed. Such insight might well inspire future opportunities for new racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994) which realign our thinking outside of the constraints of whiteness.
Chapter Breakdown

In an effort to address the interlocking nature of the issues that have been brought up in this topic, I provide a brief overview of the issues at hand by breaking them down into several sections. First, in chapter 1, I address my perspective as a researcher and discuss the problematic nature of using terms like race and ethnicity due to the way in which they sustain the very structures that I attempt to deconstruct. Next, I provide an overview of the intersections of whiteness and rhetoric, while specifically focusing on the various elements of whiteness that have emerged in this scholarship.

Chapter 2 documents the role of whiteness in the construction of race and ethnicity on U.S. census forms. This chapter specifically addresses the development of early racial classification systems and the biological and social construction arguments for race. It also focuses on the intersections between race, power, and dominance. Chapter 3 narrows the focus to racial classification and the U.S. census. It also focuses on the relationship between the census and other governmental laws. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of the development of the various rules and guidelines regarding racial classification on U.S. census forms.

Chapter 4 focuses on laying the theoretical and methodological groundwork for this study utilizing critical race theory and the practice of a critical rhetoric. It discusses the complementary aspects of these frameworks, and how they contribute to the study design. Additionally, chapter 4 lays out the study design and focuses on the data collection process. Chapter 5 begins by focusing on the master narrative that has been historically constructed surrounding racial and ethnic categorization systems. This chapter discusses several of the themes that emerge in the counter narratives and talks about how these thematic elements work together to uphold the master narrative. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the relationship
between box-checking, socialization, and self identity or self esteem; defining race and ethnicity; the power to define; and the social rules and stereotypes that play into our understanding of racial and ethnic categorization systems. This chapter also uses Omi and Winant’s (1994) discussion of racial formation and racial projects to explain how multiple thematic elements work together to frame our understanding of the master narrative.

Chapter 6 shifts the focus a bit and examines how the counter narratives relate to the census forms and elements of privilege and whiteness. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the relationship between checking off a category on a form and the privileges that might be attached to that category. In light of this, chapter 6 discusses the relationship between the White category and privilege, minority categories and privilege, disadvantages of those categories, and notions of passing. Chapter 7 moves the discussion into a new realm by addressing potential areas that can serve to disrupt the master narrative. Specifically, this chapter addresses several themes which emerge in the counter narratives, pointing out areas where the master narrative proves to be inadequate. These themes include notions of race and space, the “other” category, the use of the word Negro, and the overall feeling that the boxes are not inclusive. As a result, chapter 7 explores these themes because they represent potential future racial projects which could create cracks in the foundation of the master narrative on race and ethnicity in this country.

Lastly, chapter 8 ends the discussion by focusing on the different elements that would be involved in moving outside of the constraints of whiteness. Specifically, this chapter discusses the complex relationship between how census data is viewed by many people versus how the data is actually used. This chapter also revisits the relationship between whiteness and census history to talk about possibilities for change, and the resistance that these possibilities would likely meet. Finally, chapter 8 concludes with a discussion of what the end result might look like,
limitations for this study, and why future research is needed to further understand the impact of these categorical choices.
CHAPTER I: EXPLORING RACE AND ETHNICITY
THROUGH THE LENS OF WHITENESS

Muddled Memories of a Multiracial Past

Questioning ...

College-Undergrad: Exploring the past in order to interpret the present.

We bleed...into each other as we fruitlessly
try to separate the parts into
nice
neat
categories...
and for a while it works.
We buy into the artificial notions
proclaiming superiority
proclaiming inferiority
proclaiming that which we
DO NOT
want to acknowledge about ourselves.
We have been taught to believe the lie
but now we understand its
contradictions
and acknowledge its
falseness
yet we are afraid
to go against it
because it seems unimaginable...
to reveal the truth.
So we become a traitor to the make-believe
oneness
that now haunts us as we walk through life
promoting the need for
diversity...
when diversity is already
here
has always been
here.
You see,
diversity
IS
me.
but for far too long
i have been too blinded to see.
As a self-identified Black woman with a first-generation multiracial (Spencer, 2006) father who self-identified as Black (largely due to the one-drop rule), my research on the use of racial and ethnic labels on U.S. census forms has been undoubtedly influenced by watching the life experiences of my friends and family members. Thus, I enter this research with poignant reminders of the muddled memories which I have about how people classify themselves personally, socially, and politically. Furthermore, my experiences as a young child who wondered why people were placed into boxes which did not truly reflect their ancestry becomes intensified when I think about the multiple ways that people approach box-checking. In light of this, my interpretation of racial and ethnic categories occurs through my personal experiences of seeing people check boxes which did not truly reflect all of their ancestry. Thus, I acknowledge first hand Wander and Jenkins (1972) assertion that “the rhetorical critic seeks to unfold meaning in a body of verbal discourse, but the dimensions of meaning making up any symbol must be interpreted through his [her] personal experience” (p. 443).

Likewise, I also acknowledge the fact that my personal experiences with race and ethnicity have been undoubtedly shaped by their discursive constructions and the embedded nature of whiteness in our language system. As Fanon (1967) points out, “a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (p. 18). In their discussion of the importance of whiteness studies to rhetoric and composition studies, Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliff (2005) also highlight this when they point out that whiteness is prevalent in the ways in which it socializes how we talk about groups of people through our racially-inflected language. This reminds me of Lorde’s (1984) warning that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p. 112).
As a result, I feel that it is necessary to briefly address the problematic nature of using a language system which is inherently shaped by whiteness, while simultaneously maintaining the ultimate goal of trying to deconstruct it. Thus, while I do not systematically place words like race and ethnicity in quotation marks throughout this dissertation, I envision them to be this way in order to serve as a reminder of their socially constructed status and their historical connection to notions of White superiority and pseudo-scientific research. Likewise, this also applies to my use of multiracial and mixed race since they are premised on the idea that pure, distinct racial groups exist that can be mixed and result in multiracial people. Furthermore, I also acknowledge the problematic nature of using words like White, non-White, people of color, other, minority and majority since the use of these terms rhetorically re-centers whiteness and demonstrates how notions of whiteness are normalized in the current language system. Thus, despite my use of people of color, I also envision White as a color even as I search for ways in which to talk about non-White people without re-centering whiteness.

Given Jackson and Garner’s (1998) call for communication scholars to address how they are using terms like race and ethnicity, it becomes necessary to take the time to talk about how race and ethnicity is used in this study. When most people think of race and ethnicity, they commonly make the claim that race has to do with biological or genetic traits and that ethnicity has to do with cultural factors (Gracia, 2007). However, as Gracia (2007) points out “if this conception were scientifically and morally acceptable, it would not be difficult to draw an exact distinction between race and ethnicity and to work out the details of their relations and their ethical and political implications” (p. 2). In light of this, while I acknowledge the intersecting and overlapping characteristics of the terms race and ethnicity (Gunaratnam, 2003; Nobles, 2000;
Yanow, 2003; Gracia, 2007; Parillo, 2008), my general use of these terms makes a distinction between them in light of the way that they are constructed and presented on U.S. census forms.

Since the introduction of the Hispanic Origin question to the 1970 census and the six official racial and ethnic categories implemented by Statistical Directive No. 15 in 1977 (and its revision in 1997), the Census Bureau has used five racial categories (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Black, White) and two ethnic designations (Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino). Thus, my general use of these terms refers to the perception that race refers to the grouping of individuals based on physical appearances and differences, while ethnicity refers to the grouping of individuals based on cultural, linguistic, or religious characteristics.

Despite this, given my focus on the elements of whiteness and discourse, I share Nobles’ (2000) assertion that race is not something described using language; it is something that is actually created through language and institutional practices (p. 12). Thus, on a deeper level, my use of race in this proposal inherently stems from a social construction standpoint which recognizes the social, political, and economic aspects that are embedded in its use. Furthermore, I recognize that the existence of race “derives from and rests in language, in social practices, in legal definitions, in ideas, in structural arrangements, in the distribution of political and economic power and in contexts over such distribution” (Nobles, 2000, p. 12). In light of this, I also approach this research by looking at how race plays a role in the creation and organization of human difference, and how this manifests itself in socially and politically consequential ways (Nobles, 2000). Therefore, while Nobles focuses on how Census Bureaus help to develop and maintain the understanding of race, this study takes it a step further by specifically using
individual narratives to examine how race is constructed and upheld through discourse about the use of racial and ethnic categorization on census forms.

In the discussion of the political nature of race, it also becomes necessary to take Omi and Winant’s (1994) discussion of the dangers of thinking of race as only an essence or an illusion into consideration. They point out that when thinking of race as an essence, the temptation is to think of it as something that is fixed, concrete, and objective. On the other hand, when thinking of race as an illusion, one is inclined to think of it as simply an ideological construct that could largely be eliminated through some type of non-racist social order (p. 54). In light of this, they argue that “the effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 54). As a result, their definition of race reflects this and they define it as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of bodies” (p. 55).

This definition becomes important given the usefulness of Omi and Winant’s (1994) concept of racial formation and racial projects, and the ways in which these concepts help describe the embedded nature of whiteness in racial and ethnic census construction. Racial formation is described as a “socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55). Furthermore, in their discussion of racial projects, they point out that “racial formation is a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (Omi & Winant, 1994, pp. 55-56).

These historically situated projects (or racial projects) can be described as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.
56). This discussion of racial formation and racial projects is useful because these concepts help highlight the multiple projects that have occurred historically and that continue to contribute to the modern day understanding of race. Additionally, they also allude to way that racial and ethnic categories have been socially constructed and the ways in which whiteness has played a role in that construction.

Situating Race and Ethnicity within Whiteness Studies and Critical Rhetoric

“By viewing whiteness as a rhetorical construction...we seek an understanding of the ways that this rhetorical construction makes itself visible and invisible, eluding analysis yet exerting influence over everyday life” (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 293).

The need to study and problematize whiteness is crucial for rhetorical and communication scholars. Fifteen years ago, Nakayama and Krizek (1995) pointed out that rhetorical studies had not paid substantial attention to the need to address aspects of whiteness. In that article, they questioned what kinds of power relations were being reproduced in this discipline if scholars were not writing about whiteness within the context of academic writing (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Since that time, several scholars have directed their attention to the way that whiteness functions in a number of different contexts (Crenshaw, 1997; Hasian, Jr., 2003; Calhoun, 2005). This focus has sought to lift the silence in an effort to begin understanding how whiteness works from a rhetorical perspective.

For example, Crenshaw (1997) answers their call to focus more attention on whiteness from a rhetorical perspective by focusing on the debate between Senators Carolyn Moseley Braun and Jesse Helms over a patent extension containing a Confederate Flag. Likewise, Blair and Michel (2000) focused on the role of whiteness within the rhetorical performances of the civil
rights Memorial. Other studies have looked at the abolition of whiteness and the rhetorical strategies of “race traitors” (Moon & Flores, 2000), the role of whiteness and masculinity in the strategic rhetoric of nationalism (Prividera & Howard III, 2006), and the legal rhetoric surrounding the maintenance of interracial social boundaries (Hasian, Jr., 2003). Additionally, several scholars (Calhoun, 2005; King Watts, 2005) focus on the role of whiteness in the White rapper Eminem’s music.

The relationship between whiteness and rhetoric is explored by scholars looking at how whiteness is constructed through the discourse used by White people. For example, in their article “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” Nakayama and Krizek (1995) specifically discuss how whiteness functions as a strategic rhetoric by focusing on a variety of strategies that are used by Whites to talk about whiteness. Jackson (1999) furthers this research by using Nakayama and Krizek’s (1995) mapping technique to uncover five additional strategies that are used by White students who attend historically Black universities to talk about the nature of whiteness. In this light, several rhetorical and communication scholars recognize the need to address elements of whiteness and the way that it functions in discourse.

The discussion on the relationship between whiteness and rhetoric also contributes to the practice of critical rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989). As Flores and Moon (2002) point out, “while rhetorical scholars have a considerable history of addressing race, the emergence of a critical rhetoric project has brought increased attention to it” (p. 183). Critical rhetoricians focus more generally on race and less specifically on whiteness. Thus, scholars explore a variety of different topics and focus on several speakers that have not traditionally been studied through the Neo-Aristotelian framework. Some examples of these types of analyses include focusing on the rhetoric of racial identity (Wilson, 1999), afrocentricity (McPhail, 1998b), and immigration and
California’s Proposition 187 (Ono & Sloop, 2002). Critical rhetoricians also focus on historical figures such as Frederick Douglass (Terrill, 2003); Martin Luther King Jr. (Lucaites & Condit, 1990); Malcolm X (Terrill, 2004; Lucaites & Condit, 1990) and Louis Farrakhan (McPhail, 1998a). Given this wide variety of topics, this dissertation adds to the current research on whiteness and critical rhetoric by focusing on the visible and invisible aspects of whiteness in the everyday discourse about racial and ethnic categorization systems.

**Whiteness Studies: An Overview of Scholarship**

*Acknowledging and Believing...*

*High School: Reading this quote from Muhammad Ali and then realizing how embedded our beliefs about whiteness really are...wondering if things will ever really change.* “We were taught when we were little children that Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow. Then we heard about Snow White, White Owl cigars. White Swan soap. White Cloud tissue. White Rain hair rings. White Tornado floor wax. White Plus toothpaste. All the good cowboys ride white horses and wear white hats. The President lives in the White House. Jesus was White. The Last Supper was White. The angels are White. Miss America is White. Even Tarzan, the King of the Jungle in Africa is White” (as cited in Hauser, 1996, p. 76).

Since this dissertation explores the relationship between whiteness and the institutional and everyday discourse on racial and ethnic categories, it is necessary to discuss the attributes of whiteness that are found in the research on whiteness. Over the last 15 years, there has been an increase in research on whiteness. The underlying premise surrounding this outburst of research involves the idea that by ignoring whiteness it maintains its power and it goes un-challenged, un-
critiqued, and un-questioned. As Frankenberg (1993) states “naming ‘whiteness’ displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of dominance” (p. 6).

Despite the recent attention given to whiteness studies, prior to the early 1990s, a substantial portion of the research conducted on race and ethnicity only focused on people of color. The study of whiteness and White identity was not a part of these discussions and as a result of its absence, it emerged largely as an unmarked norm that other racial groups could be measured against. As a result, through the exploration of whiteness as an unmarked norm, interdisciplinary scholarship on whiteness has focused on a variety of different elements. Given this study’s focus on elements of whiteness, this section outlines some of the major components that have surfaced in the scholarship on whiteness.

A number of scholars (Allen, 1997; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2005) studying whiteness have focused on the historical construction of a White identity among several European ethnic groups. This scholarship has addresses several groups including the Irish (Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 1991, 2005), Italians (Guglielmo, 2003; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2005), and Jews (Brodkin, 1998; Goldstein, 2006). This scholarship also concentrates on the social and economic components of whiteness and maps out its salience in “the formation of nationhood, class, and empire in the United States and in the European colonial enterprise” (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 2).

A significant amount of scholarship on whiteness also considers the role that whiteness plays in the construction of the U.S. government and governmental policies. Saxton (1990) focuses on the role of whiteness in the early republic and on racial/class thinking in early political parties. Additionally, Katzenelson (2005) focuses on how early governmental programs were designed to help White males, thus making the assertion that affirmative action was White
during that time. Furthermore, Lipsitz (2006) discusses whiteness as a possessive investment; Harris (1995) talks about the social and legal construction of whiteness as property; and Lopez (1996) discusses the legal construction of the White category through various U.S. court cases.

Scholarship on whiteness also explores the meaning of ethnic identity to White people and their self-labeling preferences (Waters, 1990; Alba, 1990; Gallagher, 2003a; Frankenberg, 1993; Martin et al., 1996). Waters (1990) describes the use of symbolic ethnicity by Whites to describe the process of choosing particular elements of their ancestry and choosing when they want them to be visible. Alba (1990) looks at the role that intermarriage between White ethnic groups has played in the meaningfulness of ethnicity for Whites in the contemporary United States.

Gallagher (2003a) focuses on how Whites played the White ethnic card by using immigrant tales to deny contemporary racism, thus maintaining, ignoring, or discounting their White privilege. Frankenberg (1993) explores the meaning of whiteness to women by looking at how different aspects of whiteness (e.g., social geography, interracial relationships and parenting, etc.) emerge in their discourse. Warren (2003) also discusses how whiteness is performed and how it emerges in everyday conversations. Lastly, Martin et al. (1996) explore the labels that White people prefer in order to look at how different labels are constructed, and ultimately to unmask and name the various dimensions of whiteness.

In light of this, several dimensions of whiteness are identified in the scholarship that has been conducted on whiteness. One of the factors that these studies have in common is the idea that “whiteness operates as the unmarked norm against which other identities are marked” (Rasmussen, Klienenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001, p. 10). Other qualities include the idea that whiteness is invisible (to some Whites) (Morrison, 1992; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; McIntosh,
I’ve Got a Story to Tell

1988/1997; Terkel, 1992; Crenshaw, 1997), normative or standard (Dyer, 1997), connected to unearned privilege (McIntosh, 1988/1997; Frankenberg, 1993), and related to a type of personal investment and personal identity (DuBois, 1920; Lipsitz, 2006; Roediger, 1991).

However, despite the prevailing view that whiteness remains invisible, hooks (1997) points out the visibility of whiteness to non-Whites (i.e., specifically Blacks). Additionally, Gallagher (2003b) challenges the assertion that whiteness is invisible to Whites by arguing that contemporary racial politics and the effect of the media has made it practically impossible for many Whites to not view themselves in racial terms. Other elements of whiteness include the fact that it has been viewed as valued and constructed hierarchically (Ignatiev, 1995; Allen, 1997; McIntosh, 1988/1997), connected to nationhood (i.e., American) (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), linked to science/biology and connected to notions of purity (Dyer, 1997; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), and associated with guilt (Kievel, 2002). Several scholars have also looked at the role that whiteness plays in sports (McDonald, 2002, 2005; King 2005; Spencer, 2004; Butterworth, 2007).

In light of this, Frankenberg (1993, 1997) specifically addresses several aspects of whiteness that are useful when looking at the relationship between whiteness and the use of racial and ethnic categories on census forms. These include the assertion that whiteness is a location of structural advantage or race privilege, a standpoint or place from which White people look at themselves, at others, and at society, and a reference to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (Frankenberg, 1993). Additionally, Frankenberg (1997) also asserts that whiteness is normative, contextual, relational, inflected or modified based on other aspects of identity, socially constructed, and a product of history.
CHAPTER II: PAST TO PRESENT-TRACES OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC CATEGORIZATION

Questioning...

Grad. School- Dissertation Research: Reflecting on how we got into this mess and realizing while talking with Tiffany (a study participant) that I’m not the only one questioning.

Tiffany: (looking at the form) What is Asian Indian?
Candice: Indians from India.
Tiffany: Oh, okay Asian Indian as opposed to American Indian, Asian Indian (laughs). Wow. Christopher Columbus you messed up. There’s your legacy right there.

Candice: Exactly, [Tiffany: wow] exactly. So that’s the form we have that represents the world we live in.

Tiffany: It does, it does, our world.

Early Racial Classification Systems

When looking at the various elements of whiteness, it becomes necessary to look at how they have played a role in the construction of race and ethnicity on U.S. census forms. One of the most visible ways in which whiteness has played a role in the categorization of race and ethnicity on census forms has been through the government’s reliance on the use of racial classification systems that were initially developed in the 17th – 19th centuries. As different groups began to come into contact with each other, the desire to understand race fueled a large portion of the discussion in society, and pseudoscientific scholars began to classify the world around them.

As Omi and Winant (1994) point out, “it was only when European explorers reached the Western Hemisphere, when the oceanic seal separating the ‘old’ and ‘new’ worlds was breached, that the distinctions and categorizations fundamental to a racial social structure, and to a
I’ve Got a Story to Tell 23

discourse of race, began to appear” (p. 61). As a result of this contact with new worlds, individuals like Francois Bernier, Carlous Linnaeus, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Count Gobineau, and Comte Buffon began to theorize about racial classification, resulting in a continuing impact on the modern day discourse on race. This impact includes viewing races as distinct, separate entities that could be arranged along hierarchical/typological groups, and regarding race as being connected to notions of biology, blood purity, and racial hybridity. Thus, in terms of Omi and Winant’s (1994) definition, it becomes possible to view these classification systems as a racial project that has significantly contributed to the way in which racialized bodies are represented and organized today.

One of the first people to write about the idea of race and racial classification in 1684 is Francois Bernier (Gossett, 1963/1997) who uses physical characteristics, such as skin color, to create a four-type categorical system. Bernier’s classification system includes four groups (the Europeans, Far Easterners, Blacks, and Lapps-i.e., people from Northern Scandinavia), and his classification system included detailed descriptions for all groups except the Europeans. Carlous Linnaeus also advanced the thinking of racial classification through his development of a taxonomy of all living things in the 1730s (Horsman, 1981). This taxonomy included human beings as part of the “genus Homo, and the species Homo sapiens” (Spickard, 1992, p. 13). Linnaeus’s taxonomy did not include any innate social hierarchy, but his system was later expanded upon by Blumenbach to classify human races according to geographic and other physical differences. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (a student of Linnaeus) created a five-fold system in the 1770s which included five varieties of one species: Caucasian, Mongolian, American, Ethiopian, and Malay. However, Blumenbach’s greatest contribution to the modern day understanding of races surrounds his introduction of the term Caucasian to describe a group
of people whom he considered as the most beautiful race and whom originated on the southern slopes of Mount Caucus (Horsman, 1981, p. 41).

As Horsman (1981) points out, Blumenbach considered Caucasian to be “the primary or intermediate” of the five principal races, and he viewed other races as “a degeneration from the original type” (p. 47). This arrangement of races in a typological manner has profoundly influenced traditional views of race, considering that centuries after Blumenbach’s classification, people still associate racial categories with the typological approach. Spickard (1992) argues that “the typological view of races developed by Europeans arranged the peoples of the world hierarchically, with Caucasians at top, Asians next, then Native Americans, and Africans at the bottom – in terms of both physical abilities and moral qualities” (p. 14).

Another influential contribution to modern day thinking about race was made by Gobineau who advanced the discussion of race through his focus on the importance of blood, and the notions of miscegenation and racial hybridity (Young, 1995). Additionally, Gobineau argued that there was a relationship between culture, civilization, and race. Thus, he ultimately highlighted the supreme role of the Aryan race and credited them with “every achievement in the history of mankind” (Young, 1995, p. 104). In light of this link between culture, civilization, and race, Gobineau argued that the fall of a civilization would be due to instances of miscegenation. Furthermore, while promoting the superiority of the White race, Gobineau advocated for the importance of blood purity which still remains a part of modern day thinking about race in conversations about race mixing, and in associating multiracial people with blood quantum s (i.e., ½, ¼, etc.).

Despite the attention given to the typological approach and notions of blood purity, another debate regarding race emerged during the late nineteenth century surrounding whether or
not all racial groups were a part of one species (monogenesis) or different species (polygenesis). The polygenesis argument directly challenged the Christian assertion that all human beings emerged from one species (Horsman, 1981). One of the most crucial contributions to this discussion came from Comte Buffon, who provided a definition of species that quickly became the standard. Buffon continued the argument that human beings emerged from one species, and he argued that the physical characteristics emerged from differences in food, environment, and manners (Horsman, 1981). In light of this, Buffon’s definition of species argued that “two animals were of the same species if they could perpetuate themselves by interbreeding; if they could not interbreed, or if their offspring were sterile, then they were of different species” (Horsman, 1981, p. 47).

Each of these contributions to the way that individuals are classified by race are still prevalent in the modern day understanding of race and in the way that the census has historically used racial and ethnic categories. While these examples will be discussed in greater detail later, the census has relied on a typological approach to race that has been intertwined with notions of blood purity and miscegenation through its reliance on hypodescent and the one-drop rule (i.e., the classification of multiracial individuals according to the group with the lowest social status). In addition, as Nobles (2000) highlights, the racial and ethnic data from early census forms was often crucial in the role of science and how it contributed to shaping early Americans’ understanding of race. Thus, the fact that the government still relies on racial classification systems that are built on the foundational elements of racial hierarchy, blood purity, and racial hybridity demonstrates the influence that these systems still have on current thinking about race.
Race as a Biological Construction

One of the underlying assumptions to the way that race was thought about in early racial classification systems surrounds assumptions regarding biological and social notions of race. Throughout the years, scientists have conducted numerous research studies (Horsman, 1981) with the hopes of proving that biological differences exist among different racial groups. This research has measured a variety of different physical features (e.g., body structure, brain size, cranial capacity, facial angles, genetic composition, hair color/type, etc.) in order to try to establish biological distinctions (Young, 1995; Horsman, 1981). Furthermore, findings from early pseudo-scientific research on physical characteristics were often connected to differences in cultural achievement, degrees of civilization, and notions of intellectual and moral inferiority or superiority.

This connection rests on the assumption that race is innate and a biological construct that can be identified by observing physical characteristics. Thus, the biological argument is directly tied to the idea that at one point in time pure races existed which had their own distinct physical features, intellectual and moral qualities, gene pools and blood (Spickard, 1992, p. 14). Furthermore, as Young (1995) specifically points out, the emergence of successful intellectuals, civilizations, and nations was attributed to the presence of “pure” White blood (p. 128).

Spickard (1992) also highlights this when he points out that “pseudoscientific racists saw White bloodlines as the source of the evident capabilities of Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, and George Washington Carver” (p. 14). Thus, the biological argument built upon Gobineau’s discussion of blood purity and instances of miscegenation. As a result, the dilution of these pure races has been used over time to create arguments for the superiority of the White race and the inferiority of other groups. In light of this, the level of pure blood has often been
viewed as being directly related to the intellectual, moral, and physical capabilities of the person. Consequently, the reliance on notions of blood, miscegenation, and White superiority can also be viewed as a racial project (Omi & Winant, 1994) that has provided interpretations and explanations of physical differences which have served to uphold notions of White superiority.

During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, scientific research was routinely being used to uphold commonly-held beliefs about the racial superiority of Whites. However, as Horsman (1981) points out, “science provided a solid basis for the new assumptions, but the creative writers often gave dramatic expression to new beliefs of racial superiority and destiny even before the scientists provided specific proofs for what had been assumed” (p. 159). Thus, Novick (1988) asserts that “racism increased in the United States in the course of the nineteenth century, particularly in educated circles, as it acquired the authority of science” (p. 74).

In the United States, scientific findings were used to justify everything from slavery and the annihilation of Native Americans to the expansion of American territory through force (Horsman, 1981). In light of this, Horsman (1981) states that Americans had “developed policies based on their tactic assumptions of innate racial differences long before there was any scientific base for what was occurring” (p. 157). Thus, as Rasmussen et al. (2001) point out, “notions of racial inferiority emerged to justify a social structure organized around subjugation and exploitation and was then elaborated by biologistic theories of inherent differences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (p. 13).

The census also played a significant role in the use of science to defend racial superiority. Census forms were viewed as a quick way to collect statistical data on populations that were deemed to be inferior by pseudoscientific researchers. Thus, prompted by racial scientists and
proponents of eugenics, census forms began to document mental illness, fertility rates, deafness, blindness, illiteracy, insanity, and feeblemindedness (among other categories) in order to prove racial and ethnic differences (Nobles, 2000). Blacks, mulattos, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, as well as other groups, were targeted by racial scientists as they tried to document the superiority of pure Anglo-Saxon blood (Nobles, 2000; Horsman, 1981). In each case, the census was used to try to prove the inferiority of certain groups and to curb the mixing of blood in an effort to maintain the purity of the White race.

One example of the way that census forms were used to support racial thinking was the controversial 1840 census results which seemed to show a higher insanity rate among free Blacks than among slaves, thus supporting the use of slavery since it appeared that freedom drove Black people insane (Nobles, 2000). As Nobles (2000) points out, despite the fact that these statistics were fiercely challenged, “The high insanity rates quickly became a part of the larger racial discourse, confirming the view that Negroes were naturally inferior and thus uniquely suited for servitude and subjugation” (p. 32).

Another example can be identified in the addition of the mulatto category to the 1850 census which was prompted by polygenesists (most notably Josiah Nott) who “set out to prove that mulattoes, as hybrids of different racial species, were less fertile than their parents of pure races, and hence lived shorter lives” (Nobles, 2000, p. 37). Thus, as Nobles (2000) explains, what is most important in both examples is “not simply the role played by racial discourse in shaping” the debates about race “but the role played by the census in reinforcing the scientific valence of racial discourse” (p. 32). In light of this, the relationship between census data collection and scientific racism emerges as yet another racial project (Omi & Winant, 1994)
which sought to uphold the racial discourse of White superiority and maintain beliefs about innate racial differences.

Despite the multitude of research that was conducted in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries on the proposed biological differences among racial groups, the findings have been inconclusive. As a result, any scientific consensus on the nature and number of human races has been elusive. In fact, some of the scientific research that set out to prove biological distinctions has actually resulted in proving the opposite. For example, one geneticist, King (1981) argues that:

> Both what constitutes a race and how one recognizes racial difference are culturally determined. Whether two individuals regard themselves as of the same or of different races depends not on the degree of similarity of the genetic material but whether history, tradition, and personal training and experiences have brought them to regard themselves as belonging to the same group or to different groups…there are no objective boundaries to set off one subspecies from another.

(pp. 156-157)

Thus, as Spickard (1992) states “the so-called races are not biological categories at all; rather, they are primarily social divisions that rely only partly on physical markers such as skin color to identify group membership” (p. 17).

Over time, the biological/scientific argument of race died down in the face of the Holocaust and the eugenics practices promoted by Hitler in Nazi Germany. As Nobles (2000) points out, “externally, Nazism forced (social) scientists worldwide to reexamine their thinking on race” (p. 75). However, despite the move toward viewing race as a social construction, the biological argument of race has remained prevalent. Spickard (1992) argues that “while
nineteenth [and twentieth] century Europeans and Americans spoke of blood as the agent of
transmission of racial characteristics…More recently, genes have been accorded the same role
once assigned to blood” (p. 15). This is evident in scholarship by contemporary race scientists
(Jensen, 1969; Hernstein & Murray; 1994) who have revived arguments about the relationship
between intelligence and racial heredity. It is also evident in the fact that despite the resurgence
of the biological argument in the midst of genetic research, the recent Human Genome Project
has acknowledged that while physical traits such as skin and hair color can be identified between
individuals, DNA studies indicate that “no consistent patterns of genes across the human genome
exist to distinguish one race from another” (Human Genome Project Information, 2007, para.
12). Despite this acknowledgement, as Omi and Winant (1994) point out, “it has taken scholars
more than a century to reject biologistic notions of race in favor of an approach which regards
race as a social concept” (p. 64).

Race as a Social Construction

Questioning…

Grad. School- Dissertation Research: Exploring the various ways that race is constructed
around the world. Still wondering how we got into this mess as I listen to Ramona (a study
participant) talk about one of her sister’s experiences. Ramona: My sister works with
international students and she was working with this student and she called herself Black in front
of him and he laughed at her. And she said why are you laughing? He said because where I
come from Black means that you are very very very dark and he was a darker guy and she said
well what are you called in your country. And he said blue. And she said well what would I be
called in your country and he looked at her for a second and he said wheat. So, the color
gradation is a very arbitrary thing. (Ramona)
Scholars utilizing the social construction of race argument acknowledge the visibility of physical differences in human characteristics; however, they argue that systems of racial classification are deeply reflective of the societies in which they were created. For example, using differences in census category construction in the U.S., England, South America, and Brazil, Spickard (1992) points out that race has been constructed in different ways in different times and places (p. 18).

Thus, as Lopez (1995) asserts, “race must be viewed as a social construction. That is, human interaction rather than natural differentiation must be seen as the source and continued basis for racial categorization” (p. 196). Furthermore, Winant (2004) argues that “there is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of ‘race,’ and the social historical categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be imprecise if not completely arbitrary” (p. 155). Therefore, even though the biological argument of race emerged as a prominent racial project, (Omi & Winant, 1994) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, the social construction argument also emerges as a racial project due to the fact that it offers an opposing view of racial dynamics which reorganizes people’s thoughts on the matter.

Even though Blumenbach’s five-fold classification was instituted over three centuries ago, the notion of separate races remains firmly fixed in the minds of many people today. Hence, although modern day scientists have largely abandoned the biological argument for race, it appears that this revelation has not infiltrated into the larger public consciousness. Thus, Cornell and Hartman (1998) point out that “in many societies, the idea of biologically distinct races remains a fixture in the popular mind, a basis of social action, a foundation of government policy, and often a justification for distinctive treatment of one group by another” (p. 23).
Furthermore, Yanow (2003) asserts that the long association of race with science has colored the way that people think about it. As a result of this, she argues that the “usage of the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ and of the standard categories further reinforces a perception of them as natural scientific entities, rather than as humanly created, social (arti)facts” (Yanow, 2003, p. 17). Furthermore, “despite the paucity of scientific support, human beings tend to assume racial categories and to take them seriously” (Cornell & Hartman, 1998, p. 23).

Race, Power, and Dominance

Racial categories have also been historically used as a tool of dominance, and elements of domination and power have been the underlying themes for the political use of racial categories since the invention of racial classification systems. As Orbe and Harris (2001) point out, throughout U.S. history “European American men have held most of the social, economic, and political power. From this position of privilege, they have consistently created and used labels to define other ethnic groups in ways that have benefited their own existence” (p. 55).

Additionally, Morning (2003) adds, that “as the dominant group in the United States –indeed, virtually its only citizens when the first census was taken- the concerns, beliefs, and objectives of Whites have informed every aspect of American census taking” (p. 47). Thus, the creation of racial classification systems and their use by the U.S. government highlights two separate racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994) that have been used to interpret, explain, and represent racial dynamics and to reorganize and redistribute resources in ways that benefited those who could be classified as White.

In light of these racial projects, racial and ethnic labels have also been used historically to justify the actions of Europeans in colonizing other parts of the world and have often been used to validate the oppression of other groups. Spickard (1992) states that “from the point of view of
the dominant group, racial distinctions are a necessary tool of dominance. They serve to separate the subordinate people as Other” (p. 19). He goes on to argue that “putting simple, neat racial labels on dominated peoples and creating negative myths about the moral qualities of those peoples – makes it easier for the dominators to ignore the individual humanity of their victims. It eases the guilt of oppression,” (Spickard, 1992, p.19). For example, Spickard (1992) asserts that:

Calling various African people all one racial group, and associating that group with evil, sin, laziness, bestiality, sexuality, and irresponsibility, made it easier for White slave owners to rationalize holding their fellow humans in bondage, whipping them, selling them, separating their families, and working them to death. (p. 19)

Taking this into consideration, it becomes necessary to discuss how the use of racial labels to categorize other groups is connected to elements of whiteness, power, and dominance. Rasmussen et al. (2001) argue that “White supremacy has been used to justify and rationalize the genocide, enslavement, lynching, and public humiliation of people of color for centuries” (p. 12). As a result, they argue that “understanding whiteness primarily as violence and terror is associated with the view … that whiteness is properly understood as the historical legacy of colonialism and imperialism” (Rasmussen et al., 2001, p. 12). Thus, Frankenberg (1993) argues that one of the effects of a colonial discourse is the production of an unmarked, apparently autonomous White/Western self, in contrast with the marked, Other racial and cultural categories with which the racially and culturally dominant category is co-constructed” (p. 17).

Notions of power and dominance have emerged as central to the discourse used to talk about racial (and at times) ethnic categories in the U. S. context. For example, in Foucault’s
(1990) argument that language is constrained by discourse, who has the power to speak becomes important since (as he argues), power plays a central role: the people in power construct meaning and pass it along to the masses. Thus, the use of power in this way results in certain voices being restricted, while others are privileged. This is further evidenced when Foucault (1990) states that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (p. 1155).

Furthermore, Frankenberg (1993) points out that these European systems of privilege have emerged in a way that makes the labeling of non-Whites as others a natural and logical process which allows Whites to unintentionally reap the benefits of the way in which the language system is constructed. As a result, the construction of labels for non-White groups has historically been connected to notions of power and dominance through the rules and guidelines that have determined who counts as White. Thus, as a governmental institution that utilizes these categories, Census Bureaus and census forms have played an influential role in how race is shaped and categorized.
CHAPTER III: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND THE U.S. CENSUS

Upholding Whiteness: Racial and Ethnic Classification on the U.S. Census

The U.S. census has upheld notions of whiteness in a variety of ways. These include its reliance on racial classification systems, notions of racial hierarchy (i.e., hypodescent and the one-drop rule), and through the ways that these questions have been supported by other laws (e.g., anti-miscegenation laws and citizenship policies). Given Omi and Winant’s (1994) assertion that racial formation is a “socio-historical process” full of “historically situated projects,” the correlating ideas about White identity were crucial in upholding the racial classification systems that were (and still are) used on the census (pp. 55-56). As Nobles (2000) points out, “race has many, although not equally formative, sources. Science, religion, moral philosophy, law, politics, and economics have all contributed to a greater, and internally contradictory, discourse of race” (p. 12). As a result, Nobles asserts that “the power of racial discourse derives from the mutually reinforcing dynamic among these separate foundations, with science, law, economics, religion, and politics coming together on a macro level to reinforce the positive consequences of some racial memberships and the negative consequences of others” (p. 13).

Thus, as Robbin (2000) points out, “the United States has classified ‘racial’ and ‘ethnic’ group data since its first census in 1790 and since the turn of the 20th century in other federal administrative records and surveys” (p. 399). Additionally, from the very first census in 1790, elements of whiteness have been embedded in the way that race and ethnicity is classified in this country. Initially, the census was derived because Article 1, Section 2 of the “U.S. Constitution mandated that ‘an actual enumeration’ be conducted every ten years to allow for representational appointment” (Nobles, 2000, p. 26). However, as Nobles (2000) points out, these numbers were used by “southern representatives who advocated for the full representation of slaves in the federal legislature to gain a numerical advantage over the north” (p. 27).
Despite this attempt, the southern representatives “begrudgingly accepted counting slaves as three-fifths of a person due to the fact that they were both persons and property and were not entitled to representation in the legislatures of the southern colonies” (Nobles, 2000, p. 27). Thus, questions of race and notions of whiteness (i.e., racial superiority) were inherently intertwined with the numerical counts for representational appointment due to disagreements about how slaves would be counted. This decision to count slaves as three-fifths of a person was known as the *three-fifths compromise*, and even though it was abolished in 1868 by the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, the Census Bureau continued to collect racial and ethnic data (Ellis, 2000, p. 184). For instance, the first census counted the number of free Whites, free other persons, and slaves (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 67). The categorization of race remained a Black and White issue until 1850, when mulatto was added (as a subset of the Black category); 1860, when taxable Indians were added to the list; 1870 when Chinese was added; and 1890, when Japanese was included on the list (Rodriguez, 2000; Nobles, 2000).

It is important to note that a couple of these early categorical decisions already demonstrate elements of whiteness. First, it becomes important to point out that the *mulatto* category appeared under the *colored* section and not as a separate category in and of itself. This detail highlights the way that notions of White superiority were upheld through racially classifying mulattos as *colored* and not as White, which draws on the notion of protecting the blood purity of the White race. Secondly, another element of whiteness that appears in the 1850 and 1860 censuses surrounds the fact that enumerators were instructed to leave the space blank in all instances where the person was White (Rodriguez, 2000). Blacks were marked by the letter *B*, Mulattos by the letter *M*, and taxable Indians (added in 1860) were marked by *Ind*. 
Consequently, Whites emerged as an unmarked norm, and people of color were marked in comparison to Whites.

Self-Identification and *Official* Racial and Ethnic Categories

After the 1860s, racial categories continued to grow with the addition of Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Mexican, Hawaiian, and Aleut/Eskimo up until the 1960s. Nobles (2000) points out that the Civil Rights Movement and the legislation that resulted from it dramatically changed the purposes of racial categorization since census data (which had previously been used for discriminatory purposes) began to be used to remedy past injustices. Thus, in 1977, when Statistical Directive No. 15 was implemented by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), it was done to enable better compliance with civil rights legislation. Statistical Directive No. 15 “mandates the five official racial/ethnic categories used in all statistical reporting by federal agencies, including the Census Bureau” (Nobles, 2000, p. 79).

The five “official” racial and ethnic categories that Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 implemented include: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and White, and they were used in the 1980 and 1990 censuses. In 1997, OMB revised Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 and separated the Asian or Pacific Islander category into two separate entities: (1) Asian and (2) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Office of Management and Budget Federal Register Notice, 1997, para. 1-2). However, even with the creation of Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, the OMB still “instructed persons of ‘mixed racial or ethnic origins’ to be classified according to the category which most closely reflects the individual’s recognition in his [or her] community” (Nobles, 2000, p. 81).

Another major change that the Census Bureau made regarding racial and ethnic categorization surrounded the move from having census enumerators gather the information to
having individuals self-report it. As Farley (1996) highlights, up until the 1970 census, census enumerators visited households to gather information, so racial data depended on how the enumerator classified each person. However, “since 1970, race has been self-reported and each person writes down his or her racial identity. ‘Race’ for our federal system today means whatever a person chooses” (Farley, 1996, p. 210). In a similar fashion to the creation of Statistical Directive No. 15, the use of self-identification was also problematic for multiracial individuals because often they are reclassified by census workers into one of the existing mono-racial categories.

Thus, the use of race on U.S. Census forms has not been void of the influence of social perceptions of race and of the dynamics of Omi and Winant’s (1994) racial projects. Ellis (2000) states that “the constitutional rules for counting slaves and excluding Indians not taxed, the continual identification of Blacks after 1868 and the addition of Asian categories beginning in 1860, all were underpinned by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptualizations of racial hierarchy” (p. 185). This hierarchy was largely established by pseudo-scientific scholars (e.g., Bernier, Linnaeus, Blumenbach, Gobineau, & Buffon) who have left their mark on the current use of race and ethnicity on census forms through the modern day notions of White superiority, racial hierarchy, blood purity, miscegenation, and blood quantification. In light of this, racial projects like the creation of Statistical Directive No. 15 and the decision to use self-identification have provided alternative explanations of racial dynamics while still upholding aspects of White superiority.
Check ONE Box: Mono-racial Ideology and the U. S. Census

Questioning and Reflecting...

Grad School- Dissertation Research: Feeling a deep sigh of relief while listening to Ramona talk about her racial and ethnic category choices when checking boxes off on forms. Ramona: “I believe it is important to recognize all the people who went into making me who I am. Was my White great-grandfather any less important genetically than my Black great-grandmother? No. So, to limit my self-definition to one isn’t really a complete picture.” (Ramona)

Census categories have historically been informed by the notion that individuals have to be classified as belonging to only one race. This reliance on a one-race approach has reaffirmed societal perceptions about race-mixing, and it has denied multiracial individuals the right to embrace all aspects of their heritage by forcing them to check one box. As Nakashima (1992) points out, “mainstream American culture and ideology have been informed by a dominant perception that race is something absolute- that each person is either/or, and that races are mutually exclusive” (p. 164).

This reliance on a mono-racial ideology required census workers to utilize various methods in their efforts to classify multiracial individuals. This is highlighted when Nakashima (1992) declares that:

If a person, by birth, belongs to and identifies with more than one racial and cultural group, the mono-racially ‘hegemonic’ American culture is forced either to adjust the system to make room for the person or to adjust the person to fit into the system. (p. 175)

As a result, “at least partially because of, and in order to avoid this dilemma, the United States has had laws prohibiting interracial sex and marriage for most of its history, from the 1600s to 1967” (Nakashima, 1992, p. 175). However, while upholding the mono-racial ideology, the
Census Bureau has also upheld notions of White superiority and blood purity through its use of rules and guidelines (i.e., hypodescence and the one-drop rule) for the classification of multiracial individuals.

**Hypodescent Racial Projects and Census Classifications**

Christian (2000) defines hypodescence as “the notion that a person of mixed origin descent is ‘fixed’ to the ‘racial group’ of his/her heritage which has the least social status in the given society” (p. xxv). Nakashima (1992) follows this argument when she argues that multiracial people are constantly being shoved into the existing monoracial framework and that “most of the time, it is the ‘most’ subordinate of the multiracial person’s racial groups that he or she is pushed into” (p. 175). She continues by arguing that this use of hypodescence is “the manner in which the superordinate racial group is kept clearly defined and in complete political, economic, and social power” (Nakashima, 1992, p. 175).

Hypodescence is also directly related to the one-drop rule which holds that “anyone who is known to have a Black ancestor is Black” (Williams, 2006, p. 11). Ramirez (1996) points out that the multiracial heritage of many African Americans has been concealed by the one drop rule. Thus, she states that “although many estimate that 75% to 90% of the Black population is, in fact, multiracial, these individuals are lumped into a monolithic Black category” (Ramirez, 1996, p. 55). In light of this, “the one-drop rule meant that part-Black people were forced to reckon themselves Black. Some might pass for White, but by far the majority of children of African American intermarriages chose or were forced to be Black” (Spickard, 1992, p. 21). Therefore, as Robbin (2000) highlights,
The one-drop of blood (hypodescent) rule has governed both by law and in practice – the classification of ‘race’ for all ‘non-White’ persons, naming conventions, and observer perception of the proportion of African blood. This rule has privileged one class (‘White’) over all others, whether the assigned label was ‘Colored,’ ‘not White,’ ‘Other,’ ‘Mulatto,’ or ‘Mestizo.’ (p. 403)

The reliance on the notion of hypodescence is evident in census category explanations from the 1960s, which explicitly stated that “persons who reported mixed parentage of White and any other race were classified according to the other race” (United States Summary, 1970, app-15).

Additionally, the use of the one-drop rule can be directly observed through the placement of the 1850 mulatto category under the colored section, which has the unspoken assertion that one drop of non-White blood automatically makes an individual non-White. This also asserts that the only way that a person can be included in the White category is if their blood is pure and free from any drops of non-White blood. Consequently, Spickard (1992) argues that:

Historically, as a group, multiracial people have been caught in between the inherent focus on superiority and inferiority. As a way of upholding the belief in the superiority of “pure” White blood, multiracial people were constantly classified as one of the subordinate of the racial groups. As a result, the blood of multiracial people was often described as being polluted, contaminated, or stained and these descriptions ultimately served to uphold the superiority of the White race. (p. 20)

However, while the use of hypodescence on census forms appears to be straightforward, these rules were not used as systematically as some scholars might suggest (Spickard, 1992; Robbin, 2000; Nakashima, 1992). As Omi and Winant (1994) remind us, “race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (p. 55).
Because of this complexity, it becomes necessary to examine the racial classification of multiracial individuals with Native American heritage as a way to identify some of the social conflicts and interests that were evident in the classification differences between those with Black blood and those with Native American blood. This section focuses on Black and Native American racial intermixture with Whites since as Morning (2003) points out, despite the presence of Asian immigrant communities with large male populations and the interaction between White and Black soldiers with Asian women during World War II, racial mixture involving Asians was not included on any national census before 2000 (p. 48).

One of the practices used by the Census Bureau to classify multiracials with Native American ancestry was through blood quantum. Morning (2003) indicates that interestingly enough, in 1900 when fractions or quanta of blood were introduced by the Census Bureau, “it was ‘White blood’ and not Indian that was to be measured” (p. 46). Ramirez (1996) also addresses this when she points out the historical and contextual elements of this practice. Ramirez argues that while the one-drop rule was successful in maximizing the number of slaves, the practices of requiring individuals to establish a specified blood quantum was far more restrictive since it would entitle them to receive certain government benefits. Thus, as Morning (2003) points out, applying the one-drop rule to Native Americans did not have a lot of appeal from a White perspective, since in the 19th century the government began to attempt to civilize Native Americans in an effort to reduce the number who were government-dependent. Furthermore, classifying Native Americans as White or Black eliminated potential land claims, and often the multiracial status could be used as a divide-and-conquer strategy that had tangible benefits for land-hungry White settlers (Morning, 2003, p. 46).
The classification of multiracial with Native American ancestry also differed from that of those with African ancestry, since given the focus on assimilation and civilization, the former were often classified according to a wide range of social, cultural, and behavioral factors. These factors included their occupation, place of residence, social ties, and behavior (Morning, 2003, p. 46). For example, instructions to census enumerators in 1930 stated that “a person of mixed White and Indian blood should be returned as Indian [i.e., note the use of hypodescence here], except where the percentage of Indian blood is very small, or where he is regarded as a White person by those in the community where he lives” (Nobles, 2000, p. 72). Thus, “consistent with the mythology of an Indian race whose only salvation lay in amalgamation with Whites, the mixed blood represented a marked improvement over the full-blood American Indian for whom he might serve as a role model” (Morning, 2003, p. 52).

As a result, the differences in the racial projects that emerged for classifying multiracials with Native American and African blood was profound. However, despite the differences that emerged through the use of hypodescence/one-drop rule, blood quantum, and behavioral characteristics, notions of White superiority were still upheld through the reliance on a racial hierarchy that placed Whites at the top and other races below it.

Furthermore, whiteness is also evident in the focus on multiracials with White ancestry and not on those with ancestry from two non-White groups. As Root (1992) asserts, “This mixing does not conventionally threaten the border between White and non-White” (p. 6). Thus, Morning (2003) points out that “in early America, the social definition of individuals who descended both from Whites and Blacks or American Indians – the two largest non-White groups - would certainly have commanded the attention of those who were concerned with preserving or reinforcing
I've Got a Story to Tell

whiteness” (p. 49). However, despite the prevalence of racial intermixtures, census forms still upheld a mono-racial ideology.

Maintaining the Rigid Color Line: Anti-Miscegenation Laws and the U.S. Census

Mono-racial ideas of race, and their implementation on census forms through a check one box approach, have been historically supported by other laws such as the 1790 Naturalization Act which granted citizenship to free White persons and anti-miscegenation laws which sought to prevent interracial sex and marriage. The census policy of upholding a mono-racial ideology and requiring individuals to check only one box supported anti-miscegenation laws by refusing to acknowledge the children of racial intermixtures. As Lopez (1996) points out, “anti-miscegenation laws maintained the races they ostensibly merely separated by insuring the continuation of the ‘pure’ physical types on which notions of race are based in the United States” (pp. 117-118).

In 1967, anti-miscegenation laws were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in the landmark Loving v. Virginia decision which involved “a Virginia statue that made it a felony for ‘any White person [to] intermarry with a colored person, or any colored person [to] intermarry with a White person” (Colker, 1996, p. 121). As Volpp (2003) points out “by the time the Supreme Court finally declared anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional in Loving v. Virginia, thirty-nine states had enacted anti-miscegenation laws; in sixteen of these states, such laws were still in force at the time of the decision” (p. 86).

Anti-miscegenation laws are directly related to the census, because as Lopez (1996) points out, “these laws purported merely to separate the races. In reality, they did much more than this: they acted to prevent intermixture between peoples of diverse origins so that morphological differences that code as race might be more neatly maintained” (p. 117). Thus,
the development of a rigid color line allowed for the maintenance of racial hierarchy and racial
categories could be preserved if Blacks and Whites did not have children together (Hodes, 1993).
As Lopez (1996) argues, “cross-racial procreation erodes racial differences by producing people
whose faces, skin, and hair blur presumed racial boundaries. Forestalling such intermixture is an
exercise in racial domination and subordination. It is also, however, an effort to forestall racial
blurring” (p. 117).

As a result, this reliance on a mono-racial approach to racial categorization also reveals
other elements of whiteness when one considers that with most anti-miscegenation laws, the
states were concerned with reducing the intermixture between Whites and others, thus upholding
notions of racial hierarchy and blood purity. For example, Colker (1996) points out in regards to
the Virginia statute and the racial classification system, “the state was concerned with Whites
intermingling with ‘coloreds’ but did not object to various ‘colored’ subgroups intermingling
with each other. The purity of the ‘White’ race was the state’s only concern,” (p. 122). Thus,
while race-mixing was undoubtedly a concern in early American history due to the prevalence of
anti-miscegenation laws, notions of whiteness were embedded in these laws through the
protection of the White race from mixing with the blood of non-Whites. Therefore, as Lopez
(1996) highlights, “anti-miscegenation laws, like lynch laws more generally, sought to maintain
social dominance along specifically racial lines, and at the same time, sought to maintain racial
lines through social domination” (p. 117).

Free White Persons: Intersections of Citizenship, Whiteness, and the Census

One of the earliest and most fundamental challenges to the White racial category
surrounded the relationship between whiteness and citizenship. As Lopez (1996) points out, “in its
first words on the subject of citizenship, Congress in 1790 restricted naturalization to ‘White
persons”” (p. 1). Furthermore, “from the earliest years of this country until just a generation ago, being a ‘White person’ was a condition for acquiring citizenship” (Lopez, 1996, p. 1). In light of this, over time, citizenship came to be linked to White racial identity in the United States (Harris, 1995, p. 285), just as American came to be associated with White (Morrison, 1992; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

As a result of the necessity to be legally defined as White in order to be classified as a citizen, several court cases (Lopez, 1996) emerged where people challenged the categorization of White (p. 2). As Lopez (1996) points out, “the individuals who petitioned for naturalization forced the courts into a case-by-case struggle to define who was a ‘White person’” (p. 2). Furthermore, in order to justify the decisions made, the courts also “had to explain the basis on which they drew the boundaries of whiteness” (Lopez, 1996, p. 2). The courts used various factors (facial features, national origin, language, culture, ancestry, skin color, scientific speculations, and popular opinion) in order to determine whether or not someone was White.

Thus, the intersections of race and citizenship shed light on one of the ways in which the White category was legally defined, and this highlights the desire to exclude non-European American people from reaping the privileges associated with whiteness. This connection also elucidates one of the ways in which characteristics of whiteness have historically been implemented in the law, resulting in a racial project (Omi & Winant, 1994). As Harris (1995) points out, “whiteness conferred on its owners aspects of citizenship which were all the more valued because they were denied to others” (Harris, 1995, p. 285). Thus, Harris (1995) states that “the courts played an active role in enforcing this right to exclude - determining who was or was not White enough to enjoy the privileges accompanying whiteness” (p. 283).
The practice of passing attests to this, and Harris states that “the persistence of passing is related to the historical and continuing pattern of White racial domination and economic exploitation, which has invested passing with a certain economic logic” (p. 277). Likewise, Davis (1991) points out that “most passing as White was done in order to get a better job, and some who passed as White on the job lived as Black at home” (p. 56). Through passing, individuals could gain access to “a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and … increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one’s life rather than being the object of others’ domination” (Harris, 1995, p. 277). Hence, the practice of passing demonstrates that people understood the benefits that were embedded in the racialized system. As a result, this practice reinforced and legitimized the rhetorical formation of racial hierarchy and the rules regarding racial categorization (i.e., the one-drop rule), and thus upheld the connection of whiteness to privilege.

Furthermore, “in the realm of legal relations, judicial definition of racial identity based on White supremacy reproduced that race subordination at the institutional level” (Harris, 1995, p. 285). The census upheld these definitions through the various racial projects that emerged to protect the purity of the White race. Thus, while the discussion of the free White persons clause does not appear to be directly related to the categorization of race on census forms, Nobles (2000) argues that there is a “mutually reinforcing dynamic between concepts of race, censuses, and citizenship” (p. 10). Hence, “censuses help form racial discourse, which in turn affects the public policies that either vitiate or protect the rights, privileges, and experiences commonly associated with citizenship” (Nobles, 2000, p. 1).
Mark One or More: Census 2000

Reflecting...

Grad. School- Dissertation Research: Listening to Ramona talk about her experiences and wondering what it really means to finally be allowed to check multiple racial and ethnic boxes.

Ramona: When the census allowed us to self-define finally, my family had to mess everybody up because my sister, I believe, put African American, my mother put Colored, my dad put none of your damn business, and I listed every single one of the ethnicities that we are and that list is long. It is um, African American obviously, but also Irish, Scottish, Portuguese, Cherokee, Shawnee, Arapaho, and I believe, I can’t find it, but I really believe there’s some Mexican in there as well. I just haven’t been able to pin-point it exactly. (Ramona)

Since the year 2000, the categorization of race and ethnicity on U.S. census forms has significantly changed. Prior to the 2000 Census, when the government asked questions about race and ethnicity, individuals were instructed to check only one box. However, in the early 1990s, several multiracial organizations (e.g., Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA), Project RACE, and A Place for Us (APLU) gathered together to push for the addition of a separate multiracial category on census forms.

As a result of the growing pressure from multiracial organizations and other sources to revise the way that race and ethnicity was categorized in this country, the 2000 U.S. Census revised the racial and ethnic questions and instructed individuals to mark one or more racial and ethnic categories for the first time in the nation’s history. As Citro, Cork, and Norwood (2004) point out, the 2000 Census indicated a “radical departure from past practices in the collection of racial data” since it discursively moved from a mono-racial to a multiracial approach (p. 304). Thus, “by allowing individuals to report identification with more than one race, the [2000] census
challenges long held fictions and strongly defended beliefs about the very nature and definition of race in our society” (Pearlman & Waters, 2002, p. 1).

With the new mark one or more (MOOM) option, people are allowed to choose from six racial and ethnic categories “which presented a matrix of 63 possible choices, compared with 5 a decade ago” (Schmitt, 2001, p. 1). However, since elements of whiteness have been historically embedded in the classification of individuals on census forms, it becomes necessary to examine this new guideline with the same critical scrutiny; the underlying question continues to surround whether the move to a multiracial approach still upholds the historical reliance on racial hierarchy and White purity. Unfortunately, as Williams (2006) points out, the decision for the 2000 census to reclassify individuals according to the minority parent demonstrates that this has been the case. Williams (2006) states that the tabulation guidelines for the mark one or more approach stated that “people who marked White and some other racial group should be tabulated as part of the identified minority group for the purposes of civil rights enforcement” (p. 39).

This guideline is directly related to the concerns of several civil rights groups (e.g., the National Association of Colored People (NAACP), National Council of La Raza, etc.) who feared that the addition of a multiracial category would cause a reduction in their numbers (Williams, 2006; Nobles, 2000). Furthermore, Nobles (2000) points out that these organizations “largely viewed the multiracial movement as a direct threat to their political and legal interests, fearing a slow, but perceptible flight from mono-racial to multiracial identification” (p. 138). They “felt that with smaller numbers and smaller percentages of the nation’s population, they would be weakened in their advocacy” (Nobles, 2000, p. 138). This point is also addressed by Skerry (2000) who argued that civil rights organizations understand that minority members benefit when more, rather than fewer, individuals claim minority status on the census because judges and administrators
I’ve Got a Story to Tell 50

certainly rely on census data to determine affirmative action goals and quotas (p. 76). Thus, the fear is that “the multiracial category would dilute other race categories and undermine the coherence of legislation and programs aimed at historically disadvantaged groups” (Nobles, 2000, p. 140).

Ultimately, the decision was made to vote against the addition of a separate multiracial category in favor of allowing individuals to check off more than one box. However, this decision, along with the guidelines about reclassifying White/non-White multiracial individuals, undermines the principle of self-identification since people are still classified and reallocated into categories that they did not choose for themselves. Thus, notions of whiteness are still clearly embedded in this decision, despite the move towards the mark one or more approach. Williams (2006) points out that this decision still forces people to “contend with the awkward observation that the new allocation scheme is conceptually indistinguishable from the old one-drop rule” (p. 63).

As a result, while on the surface it appears that the 2000 Census fundamentally disrupts notions of race and ethnicity, elements of whiteness are still evident in the decisions regarding how multiracial individuals are reclassified. Furthermore, notions of blood purity and hypodescence are still evident in the decision to reclassify White/non-White multiracial people into the parent minority group, which serves to uphold the reliance on racial hierarchy and the previous racial classification introduced by Statistical Directive No. 15. In an effort to explore the discursive aspects of this decision and the way that race and ethnicity has generally been used on census forms, it becomes necessary to look at this issue from the standpoint of Critical Race Theory and through the practice of a critical rhetoric.
CHAPTER IV: CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND THE PRACTICE OF A CRITICAL RHETORIC

Critical race theory and the practice of a critical rhetoric were used in this study because of their similar focus on notions of power and discourse and their simultaneous theoretical and methodological components. The complementary aspects of these frameworks allowed them to be used as complementary tools to investigate the relationship between whiteness and perceptions of racial and ethnic categories on U.S. census forms. As McKerrow and St. John (2009) point out, “what prompts the adoption of a particular perspective is not the critical frame itself but the questions one seeks to answer” (p. 323-italics in original source). This chapter provides a brief overview of some of the key attributes of critical race theory and critical rhetoric and discusses how they were used to inform the study design.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical race theory represents an interdisciplinary “collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 2). CRT “borrows from several traditions, including liberalism, law and society, feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, critical legal theory, pragmatism, and nationalism” (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6). In terms of race, critical race theory argues that “race and races are products of social thought and relations” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 7). Furthermore, CRT argues that race is not objective, inherent, or fixed and it does not correspond to biological or genetic reality. Instead it argues that races are “categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 7). Thus, critical race theory’s race as a social construction works well with Omi and Winant’s (1994) discussion of
racial formation, since it is used to describe “the socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 522).

While there is no universally agreed-upon list of critical race theory components, Crenshaw et al. (1995) point out that there are two common interests that unify it. These interests include trying to “understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America” and the “desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii). Bearing this in mind, it becomes necessary to discuss some of the basic tenets of critical race theory that show up in the scholarship. First, “critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life” (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6) and because it “is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture” (Delgado & Stefanić, p. xvi). Thus, this ordinary nature means that racism is difficult to address or cure. It also means that “colorblind, or ‘formal,’ conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can thus remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination” (Delgado & Stefanić, 2001, p. 7).

Secondly, critical race theory surrounds the idea of interest convergence, a concept developed by Derrick Bell, which argues that “White elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for Blacks only when such advances also promote White self-interest” (Delgado & Stefanić, 2000, p. xvii). Thus, “because racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it” (Delgado & Stefanić, 2001, p. 7). In light of this, a third component of critical race theory focuses on the fact that it “expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy” (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6).
Therefore, it “challenges a historicism and insists on a contextual analysis of the law” where “current inequalities and social/institutional practices are linked to earlier periods in which the intent and cultural meaning of such practices was clear” (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6).

Additionally, a fourth component deals with the fact that critical race theory recognizes that “no person has a single, easily stated unitary identity” and argues that “everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 9). This recognition of the unique combination of each individual’s identity leads to acknowledging and utilizing the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities of origin when analyzing law and society (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6). As Delgado and Stefanic (2000) point out, while this unique voice of color coexists somewhat uneasily with anti-essentialism, it “holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know” (p. 9).

The focus on challenging racial oppression and the status quo leads to a fifth component of critical race theory, the use of storytelling. Delgado and Stefanic (2000) state that critical race theory challenges racial oppression and the status quo by sometimes taking “the form of storytelling in which writers analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render Blacks and other minorities one-down” (p. xvii). This use of storytelling (i.e., sometimes called counter narratives or counter stories) is described as “writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 144).

Therefore, critical race theory is often referred to as a legal storytelling movement since “it urges Black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system
and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives” (Delgado & Stefanić, 2001, p. 9). Furthermore, Ebert (2004) points out that critical race theory “challenges the experiences of Whites as the ‘normative standard’ while promoting the distinct experiences of people of color and experiences of racial oppression” (p. 178). Thus, the challenge that these counter narratives or counter stories provide to the master narrative of the law lies in Olmstead’s (1998) assertion that critical race theory authors “believe that language names, institutes and enforces an almost universal belief in the mental and moral superiority of Whites in the United States” (p. 327).

Critical Rhetoric

Like critical race theory, critical rhetoric is also concerned with the relationship between power and discourse. In his article, “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” McKerrow (1989) states that “in practice, a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power” (p. 91). One of the ways that critical rhetoric accomplishes this is by aiming “to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society- what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). This is specifically accomplished through the examination of two different dimensions: the critique of domination and the critique of freedom.

McKerrow (1989) describes the critique of domination as focusing “on the discourse of power which creates and sustains the social practices which control the dominated” (p. 92). As a result, the critique of domination emerges as having an emancipatory purpose that aims to demystify the conditions of domination. The critique of freedom, on the other hand, is described as being premised on Foucault’s treatment of power relations and as having the prospect of a
self-reflexive type of permanent criticism, constantly challenging the construction of power relations in society (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). Thus, the critique of freedom looks at how to “undermine the discourse of power and its normalization of language that is intended to maintain the status quo” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 100).

When looking at the practice of a critical rhetoric as a whole, several dimensions emerge that are important in its use. First, a critical rhetoric looks at how discourse insinuates itself in the fabric of social power, thereby effecting the status of knowledge among the members of the social group (McKerrow, 1989, p. 92). In other words, the practice of a critical rhetoric involves investigating the relationship between power and knowledge. Secondly, the practice of a critical rhetoric aims to serve a demystifying function and it tries to uncover the covert relationships between seemingly unconnected forces in society. McKerrow (1989) points out that this involves “demonstrating the silent and often non-deliberate ways in which rhetoric conceals as much as it reveals through its relationship with power/knowledge” (p. 92).

Third, practicing a critical rhetoric involves participating in a “critique that is not detached and impersonal” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 92). This is directly related to McKerrow’s (1989) call for the critical rhetorician to take on the role of an actor/inventor (p. 92). Ono and Sloop (1992) argue that this involves the critic playing the role of “a political actor, picking up fragments from the ongoing political struggle over meanings and rearticulating them, becoming another voice in that struggle, [and] thereby bringing different sets of issues and identities to bear in the study of discourses” (p. 11).

In other words, as McKerrow (1989) points out, it involves “uncovering a ‘dense web’ of seemingly unconnected relationships, pulling together the disparate scraps of discourse, and constructing an argument out of them in order to illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for
granted social practices” (p. 101). Thus, as an actor/inventor, the critic becomes more than just “an observer of the social scene” and has “as the text more than the traditional ‘speaker-audience’ scenarios in engaging in a critique” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 101). Finally, McKerrow (1989) argues that the practice of a critical rhetoric must involve consequences (p. 101). These consequences may involve the development of a critique that “establishes a social judgment about ‘what to do’ as a result of the analysis’ or to identify the possibilities of future action available to the participants’ (McKerrow, 1989, p. 92). Thus, while the goals of practicing critical rhetoric are straight forward, “critical rhetoric is best viewed as a fluid and flexible orientation, not a formal, rule-governed method” (McKerrow & St. John, 2009, p. 321- italics in original source).

Dismantling Power: Complementary Aspects of Critical Rhetoric and Critical Race Theory

Given their similar focus on notions of power and discourse, critical rhetoric and critical race theory emerge as complementary tools that can be used to investigate the relationship between whiteness and perceptions of racial and ethnic categories on U.S. census forms. First, both critical rhetoric and critical race theory focus on a power/knowledge dynamic. This is reflected in critical rhetoric’s attempt to look at how discourse becomes insinuated in the fabric of power which affects the knowledge of groups (McKerrow, 1989). It is also evident in critical race theory’s focus on the ways that ideas about race are ingrained in society and hidden within the normalized aspects of racism. Thus, as Delgado and Stefanic (2001) point out, critical race theory looks at the construction of social roles and the largely invisible collections of patterns and habits that make up forms of domination (p. 5).
Secondly, both critical rhetoric and critical race theory call for the critic/scholar to take action and try to promote change. As discussed earlier, the call for action is evident in McKerrow’s (1989) call for the critic to take on the role of actor/inventor. Likewise, critical race theory has “an embedded activist dimension where it not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 3). Furthermore, as Delgado and Stefanic (2001) point out, critical race theory “sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better” (p. 3).

Lastly, critical rhetoric and critical race theory both reject the idea that scholarship can be conducted from an objective standpoint. The rejection of objectivity can be identified in McKerrow’s (1989) assertion that critical rhetoric involves a critique that is not detached and impersonal. This rejection is also evident in critical race theory’s embrace of “subjectivity of perspective” (Matsuda et al., 1993) and the fact that it “rejects the prevailing orthodoxy that scholarship could be ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii).

Telling Whose Stories: Data Collection and Study Design

This study analyzes 20 individual narratives about the categorization of race and ethnicity as it relates to census forms from a variety of different racial and ethnic perspectives. Critical race theory “urges Black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 9). However, while critical race theory singularly focuses on the narrative perspectives of people of color, this analysis also included personal narratives from self-identified White people. Taylor (2000) highlights the importance of using White narratives in discussions of White privilege when he argued that critical race theory “would benefit from
White narratives that examine and critique White privilege in its varied forms” (p. 555).

Furthermore, as Shome (1999) highlights,

Whiteness, thus, is not merely a discourse that is contained in societies inhabited by White people; it is not a phenomenon that is enacted only where White bodies exist. Whiteness is not just about bodies and skin color, but rather more about the *discursive practices* that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain the global dominance of White imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews (p. 108).

Thus, since whiteness is prevalent even beyond White bodies, this analysis uses the narratives of both self-identified people of color and Whites in order to examine the way that whiteness is embedded in their perceptions of racial and ethnic categories used on U.S. census forms. This measure was taken because I was ultimately interested in the way that these narratives weaved together societal perceptions of race and ethnicity, rather than just focusing on the perceptions of one self-identified group.

As a result, this study includes 20 participants, six of whom self-described as multiracial or multiethnic and listed themselves as part of more than one category. Therefore, there were six participants who identified as White or part White, six participants who identified as Black/African American or part Black/African American, seven participants who identified as Hispanic/Latino or part Hispanic/Latino, three participants who identified as part Native American, and three participants who identified as Asian/Asian American or part Asian/Asian American (see Appendix A for a participant breakdown). The ages of the study participants ranged from 19 to 52, with an average age of 32 years.
Participants for this study were obtained by distributing a recruitment flyer/information sheet (see appendix B) to a variety of different personal contacts. After agreeing to participate in the study, each participant received an information packet about the study which included directions and a recruitment flyer (see appendix B), a consent form (see appendix C), a prompt for writing the narrative (see appendix D), and a census question handout (see appendix E).

This study required participants to complete two major steps: 1) the story collection form, and 2) the follow-up interview which included answering the 1990 and 2000 census questions on race and ethnicity. First, participants were given a study prompt and asked to write a story about the use of racial/ethnic categories. The narrative prompt (see appendix D) gave some brief background information about race and ethnicity on census forms and asked the participants to tell their story by recalling any personal experiences, memories, observations, examples, and/or stories in order to talk about how race and ethnicity is categorized in this country. Although these narratives often took the form of bulleted points, it gave each participant some time to freely think about their experiences with racial and ethnic categorization before they were faced with questions about it. Furthermore, it also helped during the interviews since many of the participants actually answered some of the interview questions while writing down their stories.

The second step consisted of an in-depth interview where I asked participants about their general experiences with racial and ethnic categorization (and their personal narratives) and then I asked questions about the actual 1990 and 2000 census questions on race and ethnicity (see appendix F for a list of the interview questions). The interviews for this study lasted between 45-90 minutes. The first part of the interview contained questions about their general perceptions of racial and ethnic categories on official forms and their personal experiences with racial and ethnic categorization. The second part of the interview focused specifically on the 1990 and 2000
census questions on race and ethnicity, and it contained questions about their personal identification choices.

During the second part of the interview, participants were also asked to answer duplicate versions of the 1990 and 2000 questions regarding race and ethnicity (i.e., the census question handout—see appendix E), and then they were asked to explain why they answered each question the way that they did. This technique has been used by several scholars (Waters, 1990; Rodriguez, 1992) who have explored the meaning of race and ethnicity on census forms. In addition to the census questions, the handout also contained a fill-in-the-blank question that asked participants to describe their racial and ethnic background so that they could describe it without any of the boundaries that categorization systems require. This study focused specifically on the 1990 and 2000 census questions on race and ethnicity, since the 1990 form asked individuals to check only one box and the 2000 form allowed them to mark one or more boxes. In addition, participants were asked to explain their answers so that they could offer more insight into why they checked certain boxes and to try to identify the reasons behind their choices.

Overall, since each participant completed an individual narrative and participated in an in-depth interview, for the purposes of this study I referred to the entire collection of the individual narrative, the census question handout, and the interview answers as their counter narrative. As a result, this study included twenty counter narratives that were analyzed in comparison to the master narrative (i.e., the history of racial and ethnic categorization on U. S. census forms). All of the participant names were changed in this study to protect their privacy. The next chapter will begin to focus on some of the common themes that emerged from this analysis.
CHAPTER V: THE MASTER NARRATIVE

“Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated. If race is not real or objective, but constructed, racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 43).

It has taken several centuries and numerous racial projects to get to this point in history. Our present-day racial and ethnic classification system is used in government, in schools, at jobs, and in families; yet it continues to embrace concepts that come from pseudoscientific research and classification systems developed over three centuries ago. The categories that are seen most often today (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Black, White, and Hispanic or Latino) are a reflection of a political consensus on who gets to be counted, for how long, and how often (Lee, 1993).

While these categories seem to be firmly entrenched in the minds of many Americans, just looking at the history of U.S. census forms reveals that these categorization systems have been changed many times. As Rodriguez (2000) points out, “these categories describe the population(s) from the perspective of those who have the power to select them, and in turn, they influence the way that populations see themselves” (p. 65). As a result, people have stories to tell from their encounters with racial and ethnic categories and while this research spent a significant amount of time discussing how individual participants view racial and ethnic classification, it is also important to focus on how their stories can be weaved together to shed light on the master narrative (i.e., the everyday understanding that people have of racial and ethnic categories based on history).

Rodriquez (2000) describes the everyday understanding of racial and ethnic categories as a “sharply defined bipolar structure” where “two socially constructed polarities have evolved that
contain ‘Whites’ at one end and ‘other social races’ at the other” (p. 65). While this bipolar structure has experienced some fluidity throughout the history of the census in the form of the introduction of new categories, the basic structure of White versus other races has remained the same. Rodriguez’s definition also describes the master narrative on racial and ethnic categories that is prevalent in all the aspects of life. The master narrative on racial and ethnic categories in the U.S. describes the categorization system as a bipolar structure (White versus other races) where White is the majority and other races and ethnicities represent minorities. It also includes six official racial and ethnic designators: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native or Pacific Islander, Black, White and Hispanic or Latino. Since these racial and ethnic terms have been made official by Statistical Directive No. 15 and its revisions in 1997, they are required to be used in any type of federal reporting. In addition, until the 2000 census, individuals could only choose one race, so these categories were also presented as being mutually exclusive.

Clearly, part of the power of the master narrative is that its reliance on elements of whiteness are embedded in the language system where White becomes a normative category that other races and ethnicities are measured against. As a result, when I use the term master narrative, I am using it to describe the embedded nature of White superiority that has been ingrained in the racial and ethnic classification systems that are currently being used in this country.

As I begin to uncover several of the thematic elements that make up this structure, storytelling emerges as a useful technique to identify how these elements work together. Delgado and Stefanic (2001) point out that storytelling is one way to name, combat, and deconstruct discrimination and racism. Thus, in order to begin identifying how elements of whiteness are embedded in the construction of racial and ethnic categories, it is critical to name the master narrative and then look at how all of its parts work together. As McKerrow (1989) points out,
this process involves “uncovering a ‘dense web’ of seemingly unconnected relationships, pulling together the disparate scraps of discourse, and constructing an argument out of them in order to illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for granted social practices” (p. 101). As a result, during the next couple of chapters, I identify themes that emerged from the counter narratives in order to uncover the various ways in which these seemingly unconnected forces work together to uphold notions of whiteness in racial and ethnic categorization systems.

Chapter 5 begins this analysis by focusing on several themes that emerged in the counter narratives from the participants. These include the relationship between box-checking, socialization, and self identity or self esteem; defining race and ethnicity; the power to define, and the social rules and stereotypes that play into an understanding of racial and ethnic categorization systems. This chapter also uses Omi and Winant’s (1994) discussion of racial formation and racial projects to explain how multiple thematic elements work together to frame an understanding of the master narrative. In many of the counter narratives that emerged in the analysis, participants discussed their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with the master narrative about race and ethnicity which is prevalent in the U.S. and on census forms. By doing this, in many ways they follow Delgado and Stefanic’s (2001) lead in casting “doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144).

Box-Checking and Socialization

*Wondering, Questioning, and Believing...*

*High School: Acknowledging the impact of my self-identification choices, I sat down one day and out spilled my story:*

*The Indian in me is dead.*

*She died when I became Black...*
I’ve Got a Story to Tell 64

died with the Black pride movement...
died when the teacher told me that
the kid in school was right.
I was Black despite the fact that I thought I was Indian too.
That’s not mixed she said.
The Indian in me tried to survive
But like an old war hero
All that’s left now are stories to tell and retell
When the time is right and the people are willing
To listen.
The Indian in me tried to survive off my grandfather’s stories but
She became sick when my Black peers told me
“everybody’s an Indian…”
So she died because she realized
That she would not be recognized.
The Indian in me cried when my mother told me
I was Black...
and when my cousin who is just as much an Indian as me told me
she was Black too.
So the Indian in me tried but cried as she died...
Murdered by her own people...
Forgotten and extinct by the children who like me
Took their crayons out to draw a picture
and realized that the Black crayon
covers all the other colors.
So the Indian in me died …But her spirit lives on.

How do people learn about race? How do they know that they are Black, or White, or Native American, or if they are Other? People learn because somewhere along the journey they encounter classification systems that require them to either fit into the pre-existing boxes, or rebel against the structure and try to change the system altogether. While discussing their personal experiences with the racial and ethnic categorization system in this country, the majority of the participants talked about the first time that they had to think about their racial and ethnic background. In discussing this, many participants talked about their first encounters with classification systems or about conversations that they had with family members about someone who was different from them. In these encounters, what many of the participants were actually
detailing was how they were socialized to learn about the master narrative that relates to box-checking and racial and ethnic categories.

For example, Joan, a 39-year-old who self identified as Asian American, gives a broad example of this socialization process. She states:

I think we’ve been conditioned to think about categories like that because those are the only choices you get, so I think that society has (or the government) [laughs] has done a good job of getting people to think that - to think in those narrow boxes and not really see how there is – there are differences within each category. (Joan)

While Joan is talking in general about how people learn to categorize according to racial and ethnic classification systems, her account highlights several important factors when Omi and Winant’s (1994) racial formation and racial projects are taken into consideration. Racial formation is described by Omi and Winant as a “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55). Furthermore, they also go on to state that it is also “a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (Omi & Winant, 1994, pp. 55-56).

In light of this, what Joan’s observation highlights is the nature of the socio-historical process which she refers to when she states that people have been “conditioned to think about categories like that because those are the only categories that you get.” Her account also highlights the fact that categories are created in specific ways – she mentions this when she states that “the government has done a good job of getting people to think…in those narrow boxes and not really see how…there are differences within each category.” In light of this, her discussion of the conditioning of society (i.e., the way that people have been socialized to think about race)
relates to the fact that there have been numerous racial projects that have existed throughout history which have played a role in how certain bodies and social structures are represented and organized. Joan’s discussion of the fact that there are only certain choices and the fact that people think in those narrow boxes demonstrates part of the racial formation process because it shows how people are socialized to think about the master narrative.

In order for the master narrative to continue to work in the lives of families over centuries, people have to believe in the categorization system and uphold and abide by it over time. Much like Gramsci’s (1971) discussion of hegemony, a large part of the way that the master narrative works pertains to the way in which people have been socialized to think about racial and ethnic categories. That socialization becomes ingrained when parents/families teach it to their children, and the children teach it to their children, and so on. This in itself is partly an example of a racial project since Omi and Winant (1994) define it as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (p. 56). While resources are not necessarily being reorganized in the parents/families example, explaining the racial and ethnic categorization system to a child is an example of “an interpretation, representation or explanation of racial dynamics” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 56). The master narrative is able to carry on simply because the cycle of explaining categorization systems to children keeps going on until a new racial project emerges that disrupts the current thinking on the subject.

In the counter narratives that emerged, there were several examples of how participants were socialized to think about racial and ethnic categorization systems. One example of this process occurs when Miguel, a 25-year-old who self identified as Mexican/Chicano discusses learning about racial and ethnic categories. He states:
I’ve Got a Story to Tell

It didn’t really hit me until I was in high school. You know along my younger years, you’re just being told that you’re this, you’re this. So, Latino and Hispanic becomes so embedded in you that that’s what you start calling yourself. That’s what you answer to - Mexican. (Miguel)

In this example, one can see how Miguel learned about how he fit into the current racial and ethnic categorization system and how that impacted his self-identification choices. Part of the racial formation process involves how people learn to inhabit certain racial and ethnic categories, or basically how they learn where they fit into the system.

The idea of one’s racial/ethnic identity becoming embedded or inhabited is also discussed by Ashley, a 25-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American. She discusses this in her counter narrative when she talks about the first time that she had to think about her race and ethnicity, and how by the time that she actually had to fill out a form she “automatically knew.” For example, she states:

I remember probably checking my race category. Oh, did we fill it out in elementary? Ok, so maybe yeah, in elementary school then. Like the first day when you fill out those little cards. So, yeah, but I didn’t really have to think twice about it. I mean, I just automatically knew that I was Black or African American. (Ashley)

In this example, Ashley is talking about how she automatically associated with the Black or African American category. She further demonstrates how this is related to the socialization process when I asked her why she chose the Black/African American box on her census form. She answers by saying that it is “based on my family history and how society labels me. Based
on my skin complexion and cultural background, I consider myself Black/Negro or African American” (Ashley).

Like Ashley, several other participants pointed out that one of the ways in which they learned about how they would be classified racially or ethnically was through confirmation of their racial or ethnic background from others. Joy, a 28-year-old who self-identified as fifth-generation Japanese American, recalls this when talking about her interaction with the parents of her friends. She states:

I think your friend’s parents, they also point out that you are different from their kids, so um, yeah, I didn’t feel like I was really Asian or Japanese until I was in college and then when I started learning more about being Asian or what it meant to be Japanese, I started making those connections. And um, and uh, then when I started to learn more about my grandparents, then I realized, oh there is this huge difference. Because I think my parents just let me be whoever I wanted to be during the time that I was young and uh, it was fine that way. (Joy)

Nancy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as “EnIrDanGerman or White,” also addresses the role that the confirmation of others played. In her counter narrative, she says that she considers her race to be White because:

I have never had confirmation of anything else (from my parents or by going through ancestry). Though my background is a mix of various European cultures, they are all considered ‘White.’ My grandfather was Native American (or claimed to be) but because he was later adopted by a White couple, it’s hard to find documentation. (Nancy)
While these examples appear to be rather straightforward accounts of how different individuals learned about their racial and ethnic ancestry, on a deeper level they also demonstrate one of the ways in which the master narrative works. The master narrative continues to perpetuate itself because it is a socio-historical process—one that individuals learn to participate in as they learn how to represent and organize their own bodies and the bodies of other people. Several scholars (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1967; Blumer, 1969) have documented the relationship between self and society and the central role that communication plays in identity formation. Through communication with other people, these participants learned how they fit into the current racial and ethnic classification system. They learned this by being grouped in the same category, or in a different category, than other people. The idea that people learn to define themselves by being placed in similar or different categories (i.e., groups) than other people has been explored by several scholars (Tajfel, 1974; Turner, 1987; Helms, 1994) who have studied in-group and out-group behavior. Thus, even though small children often have very particular ways of talking about people’s racial and ethnic characteristics, over time they learn how categorization systems work and how people are classified in this country according to the master narrative.

Kathy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as African American/Native American, specifically talks about this when she tells a story about doing a project for school. She states:

When I was a child, I asked my father about our family tree. You know it was one of those projects that some kids have to do and I had to ask well ok dad am I Black or what am I? And he says well we have Native American blood in our family, my dad is a full blood Indian. And when he said that I was just kind of like oooh, I’m something besides Black, you know. That was like a bonus to me and uh then he got into details like well he is from the Creek tribe and yada,
yada, yada, and he lived on a reservation and I was like cool, I’ve got something
that I can kind of add to myself. (Kathy)

Kathy’s story provides a detailed example of how individuals learn about the racial and ethnic
categorization system in this country and the process that occurs which leads people to inhabit
certain racial or ethnic categories. Joan, who self-identified as Asian American, also discusses
the socialization process that occurs and how it is related to racial and ethnic categorization
choices. She starts off by talking about gender and how she feels like she has been programmed
from birth on. She states:

You know like when you start school, you have to choose if you are a boy or a
girl. Well, what if you don’t want to be a boy or a girl? But, you also have to
choose you know, you have to check a box, are you White, are you Black, are
you Asian or not. (Joan)

In this selection, Joan talks about the socialization process from both a gender and a racial/ethnic
standpoint. While this seems rather uncomplicated, Joan’s counter narrative goes on to discuss
how problematic it was for her to check boxes as a child because of her biracial background.
This can be identified when she states:

And me personally, I for the longest time because I was biracial - my mother
was the only Korean person that I knew other than some of her friends. I grew
up with my father’s family who was all White, so I had no - I didn’t know of
anything different. I just, so, I would check a box and I was - I was White.
There wasn’t – because I wasn’t, I wasn’t Asian. Because when I thought about
it, I really thought about it, I’m like, no I’m not Asian. I was born here, I was
raised here, but yet I really wasn’t White, but that was my only choice.
Joan goes on to point out that it wasn’t until she was older (in and beyond college) that she began to change the way that she self-identified. She states that:

I was like wait a minute – this isn’t me, but that’s not me and I’m kind of in the middle but there’s no box for me to check to say that um, I’m Asian American. Because I think that it until recently it wasn’t even Asian American, it was just that you were Asian and so you kind of had to choose something that was not, not true to where you were – where you would want to consider yourself.

(Joan).

This example of not being able to fully reflect one’s racial/ethnic background when checking off boxes on a form demonstrates the ability of counter narratives to provide an account that is much different from the way in which race and ethnicity is presented in the master narrative. Until the 2000 census decision to allow people to mark one or more racial and ethnic categories, the master narrative on race and ethnicity often presented the categories as mutually exclusive. As a result, people had to choose the one category that most closely reflected how they saw themselves. As Nakashima (1992) states “if a person, by birth belongs to and identifies with more than one racial and cultural group, the mono-racially ‘hegemonic’ American culture is forced either to adjust the system to make room for the person or to adjust the person to fit into the system” (p. 175).

Until recently, in this country, the master narrative has largely followed the guideline of adjusting the person. Joan’s story - of not easily fitting into the racial/ethnic classification system that was presented to her on forms - details how problematic the master narrative can be at times. This can also be identified when Michael, a 40-year-old who self-identified as Latino/White tells a story about how he learned to reflect his ancestry. Like Joan, Michael’s story also demonstrates
I’ve Got a Story to Tell

the problematic nature of the master narrative, because although he is half Mexican, he had always considered himself to be White. He states:

Throughout the years, I have always checked the box labeled White. One day my aunt questioned my action. I told her that I was checking the White box because I was White. From that moment on, she proceeded to inform me that I wasn’t White, I was actually Hispanic. She informed me that I was half Mexican and half American. I was informed that I was denying myself the other part of my ethnic heritage. (Michael)

Michael goes on to talk about how he doesn’t look Hispanic/Latino because he takes after his dad who is White, and he has a light complexion and no Hispanic/Latino features. He continues by stating that:

After the conversation with my aunt, I started choosing differently on ethnic forms. And ever since that, I’ve always chosen Hispanic…So, those would be the choices I would use from that point forward. Now, when people ask me what nationality/what race I am – I tell them Hispanic. And they look at me like – excuse me? They don’t see me as being Hispanic because for one I take after my dad- so all my looks and traits are from his side…So, people always question me – you are not Hispanic, you are not Mexican, yada, yada. No, yes I am. Then I have to proceed to tell them the little breakdown. I am half Mexican so that makes me Hispanic. But, it would be a lot easier if I didn’t have to explain it. It really would. (Michael)

Joan and Michael’s counter stories shed light on some of the reasons why the master narrative is problematic. Along with the other excerpts, these stories highlight some of the ways that the
socialization of racial and ethnic categorization occurs when people learn about the master narrative. Overall, the master narrative can be explained using Omi and Winant’s (1994) racial formation and racial projects because it works as a socio-historical process where racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and sometimes destroyed during the process. Furthermore, over time the master narrative becomes a series of “historically situated” racial projects where human bodies and social structures are represented and organized. In the midst of this process, individuals are socialized to fit seamlessly into a system that is far from seamless.

However, since the master narrative is a process that works through social construction, theoretically it should also be capable of being deconstructed. As Root (1996) points out, “consider the power the U.S. Bureau of the Census has in reconstructing race every 10 years. It would also have considerable power to slowly deconstruct race” (p. 5). During the research, two study participants actually discussed what it would be like if the United States had different categorization systems and how that might influence the way that people thought about racial and ethnic categories. Kathy stated that she thought a different system would change the way in which she thought about things:

I think so because it would kind of – it would take away that stigma – that you know categorization – that boxing. Um, hum. Anyway, yeah, I think it would take it away. It’s just like historically, we have to classify animals. Ok, well did I – I didn’t know that was a bear until I knew that it had fur, it stood tall, it killed people [laughs] and so on and so forth. So, I think that if we move that box, I think it would probably have some impact on how we interact with others. (Kathy)
Elizabeth, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian, also addressed this when she stated that while it might not influence how she thought about race, it might influence how younger generations think about it:

I think that at this stage in my life, I would think it was odd if the categories were different than what I am used to. I don’t think it would change my inner thoughts about the subjects – but it could possibly influence the younger generations. I think a lot of times I tend to see people in the categories listed above- White, Black, Hispanic, Other. And, if I see a person I put them into those categories mentally. If the categories were different, children growing up may have a broader way of classifying people that they see/meet. (Elizabeth)

While these participants offer counter narratives which address the socialization process and master narrative, they also highlight the way in which the current categorization system influences how people see the world and how it impacts their lives. The next section discusses how participants talked about how the master narrative and box-checking can impact a person’s self-identity and self-esteem.

**Box-Checking and Self-Identity/Self-Esteem**

While many people view the racial and ethnic categories that are seen on forms as unimportant, many have been impacted by these categorization systems in terms of how they view themselves and the world around them. Tiffany, a 38-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American highlights this when she states:

When you check off a box and you assume that sort of identity for yourself, um, sure it definitely changes the way that you interact with the world. With who
you may group yourself with, with who you may feel more comfortable
with…So, of course it – it absolutely frames the way that you look at the world.

(Tiffany)

Like Tiffany, several other participants discussed how checking boxes off on forms has impacted their self-identity and/or self-esteem. Lisa, a 30-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian discussed the impact that checking the White box and being merged with other White ethnic groups has had on her. She states “if I knew how many Germans, Norwegians, and Yugoslavians were living in the U.S. I would feel more of a sense of identification with my heritage here” (Lisa). She goes on to point out that checking ethnic boxes instead of a general White category would also help her remind herself of her ancestry. This is evident when she states that “I might want to explore it more if I started to see myself as distinct from other White people AND want to know more about the diversity of others, you know?” (Lisa).

While Lisa highlights some of the positive outcomes that can be associated with box-checking and self-esteem/self-identity, several other participants pointed out negative consequences of checking off boxes on forms. For example, both Samantha, a 29-year-old who self-identified as White/Caucasian, and Nancy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as “EnIrDanGerman or White,” discussed the guilt associated with checking the White box. Several scholars (Dyer, 1997; Terkel, 1992; Kievel, 2002) have addressed the impact of White guilt. Dyer (1997) points out that when Whites accept themselves as White and know the history associated with White people, it causes guilt about what has happened in the past and what is still happening today (p. 11). However, despite this, Terkel (1992) points out that it is necessary to move past this guilt and expose the invisibility of whiteness in order to examine the ways that White domination continues.
In the counter stories, the discussion of White guilt emerged in several instances. For example, this can be identified when Samantha talks about feeling tension when having to check off the White box. She states “I definitely had to deal with being the ‘oppressor’ and some White guilt. German-Hitler. Russian-Stalin. White people- slave owners,” (Samantha). This is also evident when Nancy states in her counter narrative “I, for whatever reason, have a lot of White guilt. So, instead of playing up my whiteness, I tell people that I’m a mutt (Irish, German, etc.).” While Burke (1966) discussed the role that naming and symbols plays, several other scholars have discussed how labels can influence a person’s self-concept (Larkey, Hecht, and Martin, 1993).

The examples by Nancy and Samantha demonstrate how box-checking can impact a person’s self-identity and self-esteem. In addition, they also provide alternate accounts of how racial and ethnic categorization systems impact the individuals who are confronted with them in their daily lives. While the master narrative often presents the White category as a blissfully merged exclusive category that other racial and ethnic mixtures are denied entry into, these counter narratives present a different side to the story. Specifically, these examples cast doubt on the way that the White category is presented by discussing the impact of not being able to connect with one’s ethnic ancestry and discussing the guilt associated within whiteness.

While discussing the impact of box-checking on self-esteem and self-identity took the role of guilt in Nancy and Samantha’s counter narratives, for other participants checking off boxes created tension in terms of their self-identity/self-esteem in other ways. For example, Miguel, a 25-year-old who self-identified as Mexican/Chicano, discussed how he tried to challenge people to look at the way that colonization is embedded in our category choices. He
pointed out that his biggest challenge is among other people of color who don’t want to associate with their non-White ancestry. He states:

At least, my biggest, um challenge is among other people of color. Like around other Mexicans because with my White friends I can just put something in their way like it’s in your history book, it’s in your colonized language what it’s saying so - so, I almost, I almost use their words against themselves…they can’t really say something like the Spaniards did you a favor or whatever. But when it comes to other people of color say Mexicans, they um, they actually put up that challenge because some of them actually feel like they should be proud of being, of being Spanish or whatever that means or of having some Italian background and that, that’s my biggest challenge there and I’m usually very successful with it but it’s when grieving starts and I’m not. And that’s when I find that there’s really no point in doing it. But um, that’s the only time when I actually feel like set, and I know it’s not their fault necessarily; it’s whoever told them that. (Miguel)

As Johnson (2003) points out “a ‘Spanish’ heritage is not an uncommon myth and indeed is one embraced by some Latinos today. Many understand at least implicitly that being classified as Mexican is disfavored in the United States, especially in the Southwest before the development of the civil rights consciousness of the 1960s” (p. 177). Johnson goes on to point out that:

The phenomenon of Latinos attempting to ‘pass’ as Spanish, and therefore as White, is a variation of the ‘passing’ of other minorities as White. To many Anglos, being ‘Spanish’ is more European, and therefore more acceptable to Whites, than being of Latin American ancestry. (p. 177)
Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as a Multiracial Ethnic American also addresses how fitting into the racial and ethnic categorization system can impact a person’s self-identity and self-esteem. She addresses this in her counter narrative when she tells a story about her cousin. She states:

Um, you know, that’s one of the problems that my biracial cousin actually has is that one of my cousins always gave her grief about well are you Black or are you White? And she [the biracial cousin] says well I’m Black. And she [the other cousin] says well you don’t look Black, you look White. And so she had a hard time finding herself and fitting in and she has self-esteem issues to this day because of incidents like those. So, I think it does a lot of damage internally that people don’t see when you force people to box themselves off that way.

(Ramona)

The notion of being forced to fit into certain categories can also be identified in Rosario’s counter narrative. Rosario, a 19-year-old who self-identified as half Polish and half Mexican, discusses the impact that box-checking had on her as a young child who had to fill out racial and ethnic questions on standardized tests. She states:

This box, for me, personally was difficult to answer. It made me choose which part of my background I wanted to correlate myself with more than the other. I would always take an extra minute on this question to decide what background I wanted to associate myself with that day. It seemed ridiculous that I always had to choose and that there wasn’t a bubble that allowed me to pick more than one option. (Rosario)
Rosario goes on to talk about how by the time she made it to high school there were more options, but still no options that allowed for an individual to check more than one racial/ethnic category. She stated “it seemed that a person in America could not be Caucasian, Mexican, and American. And most people, who come from more than two different backgrounds, still had the problem of choosing which category they belonged to” (Rosario). She continues by pointing out that in all her years of test-taking they always had questions like this on the tests. When answering them, she said “they would tell us to fill the box we most associated ourselves with or felt we liked better” (Rosario).

In her counter narrative, Tiffany also discusses this when she talks about some of the concerns that she has when checking off racial and ethnic boxes for her 5-year-old who is multiracial. This can be identified when she states:

But getting her geared for school each year - now we have to fill out all the forms and it is right there in bold face- you know- what is she? Now, the forms, yeah I can check off White or Black and now there’s multiracial, so I do that, whatever that means…this big huge sort of nebulous category where anybody and everything can fall into it and it doesn’t – you know what does that do for a person’s identity. It doesn’t have any meaning whatsoever. So, I’m just, I’m confused about it. I’m confused. (Tiffany)

Ramona also discussed the impact that checking off racial and ethnic categories had on her self-identity. In her counter narrative, she discusses this during her transition from identifying as Black to identifying as multiracial/multiethnic. She states:

One of the other times in college, probably around my junior or first senior year, I started to define as multiracial. That was when I really, you know, started
realizing that Black wasn’t adequate and I definitely wasn’t White so – and I’m not biracial because both of my parents look like I do, so I really was like okay I’m multiracial, multiethnic. And I started calling myself a person of multiracial descent which really confused all of my friends and when I started doing that, I would correct them when they would call me Black. And I would say, no I’m a- and they would say that’s too long- what are we supposed to call you? Ramona, I’d say, and um they kinda, kinda laughed it off. (Ramona)

The notion of not being able to check more than one racial and ethnic category has diminished largely due to the 2000 decision to allow individuals to mark one or more category. However, when taken together, these stories problematize the master narrative’s idea that there are clear-cut boundaries between racial and ethnic groups. These examples highlight the fact that the master narrative’s presentation of racial and ethnic categories as mutually exclusive is inadequate for many real-life situations. Additionally, when looking at this from a historical perspective, these excerpts demonstrate how perspectives on racial and ethnic categorization systems change over time, and also how new racial projects can disrupt thinking. In light of this, the next section discusses how participants actually defined the commonly used terms race and ethnicity in order to talk about how these relate to the way that the master narrative is constructed.

Defining Race and Ethnicity

One of the themes that emerged in relation to how racial and ethnic categories are constructed in the master narrative has to do with how participants defined the terms race and ethnicity. As Farley (1996) points out, “how we think of race and the terms we use to classify the population have changed profoundly in the last half-century” (p. 1). Farley goes on to mention
that during the time of the civil rights revolution “we assumed that most Americans could be readily categorized as either Black or White. But now, the meaning of race, how people should be classified, and which terms should be used are under contention” (p. 1). The narratives from this study reflect this shift. Although race and ethnicity are commonly used words in this society, several of the participants had a hard time actually defining these terms. Thus, this section explores the definitions of race and ethnicity that emerged in the counter narratives and functions as a window through which to see additional glimpses of how the master narrative appears to these participants.

Most of the participants in this study acknowledged some of the differences between race and ethnicity and actually described them in ways that are similar to how they are listed on U.S. census forms. For example, when asked to define race and ethnicity, Emily, a 53-year-old who self-identified as Black, states:

Race and ethnicity? Ok, race would be uh, what color you are - the color of your skin, like you could be White, Asian - and ethnicity would be belonging to uh, you could be a White Jewish person, but your ethnic background would be Jewish or something like that.

Samantha, a 29-year old who self-identified as White/Caucasian, also generally describes it in the same way. She states “well, I think I’d say ethnicity has to do with the cultural customs and norms associated with a geographic region where race has more to do with physical characteristics and genetics, skin color, hair, etc.” (Samantha). In both of these examples, the participants point out some of the commonly associated principles of race and ethnicity. According to Gracia (2007), when most people think of race and ethnicity, they commonly assert that race has to do with biological traits and that ethnicity has to do with cultural factors.
However, Gracia (2007) and several other authors (Gunaratnam, 2003; Nobles, 2000; Yanow, 2003; Parillo, 2008) indicate that while these definitions seem rather straightforward, race and ethnicity have several overlapping qualities as well.

While trying to describe the differences between race and ethnicity, several participants actually pointed out that they were confused about the differences between the terms. This can be identified in both Ashley and Nancy’s counter narratives. For example, Ashley, a 25-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American, states:

Hmmm, I’ve often been confused, like I don’t know if there is a difference between race and ethnicity. I’ve looked them both up, but I don’t remember exactly what it says - but I’ve always been confused between both of the terms. I don’t know if they are one in the same. But when I think about race, I think about skin color, I don’t think about like religion or anything like that. I just think about strictly your skin color when I think about race. I think with ethnicity, it may have to do with um, maybe your cultural background.

Likewise, Nancy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as “EnIrDanGerman or White,” also admitted that she was confused by the terms. When asked how she would describe them, she states “Well, I’m pretty sure I don’t use them correctly. Most of the time I use them interchangeably” (Nancy). Despite the fact that she felt like she didn’t use them correctly, she went on to state that:

Race, I would think refers to your specific- wait, hang on- race, I think, is more of a general term (White) and ethnicity may be more about the different components of your background (Irish, etc.). I don’t know if that’s right, but that’s how I normally view it. (Nancy)
These two excerpts from Nancy and Ashley’s counter narratives demonstrate the feeling of many people who are aware that they use the terms interchangeably. The idea that the terms can be used interchangeably can be identified when Sarah, a 41-year-old who self-identified as a Hispanic of Mexican descent, states:

   To me, I think of them as one in the same. Just like to-mato/to-mat-o. You know, that’s- that’s how I would do it you know. Again, going back to the survey thing, they were trying to tell me that one was a – because I said that I was Hispanic/Latino that that was an ethnicity and it wasn’t a race.

In this example, Sarah references an experience that she had where she received a survey for federal jury selection. After filing out the form and mailing it back, a couple of weeks later she received it back in the mail with a post-it note on it asking her to re-fill out the race question. The note indicated that she could not mark other race and put down Hispanic/Latino because that was an ethnicity; they wanted her race. They told her that she had five choices-White, Asian, African American, Native American, or Other - but she could not put down Mexican American or Hispanic/Latina under the other race category. In recalling this experience, she states:

   So, I felt that they were making me decide - no you’re not that, you’re going to be what I want - and these are the ones that you have to choose from. Even though they had other - but the other wasn’t what they were looking for. They were trying to get me to pick one of what they wanted me to pick. It’s like they were forcing me to be something they wanted me to be and that’s not what I am. I’m Mexican. 100%, so – and it was like I was being told that I had to be what they wanted me to be. So, I left it as is and sent it back in and I haven’t heard from them [laughs]. (Sarah)
Although Sarah is not providing a definition for race and ethnicity in this example, this excerpt does highlight the discrepancy that exists between how she saw race and ethnicity and how it was viewed by the jury selection board. In her book, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States*, Rodriguez (2000) discusses the differences between how race and ethnicity are viewed by the Census Bureau and how they are viewed by many Latinos. Rodriguez points out that “the U.S. Census Bureau’s official position has been that race and ethnicity are two separate concepts” (2000, p. 6). However, despite this distinction, when many Latinos filled out the census form, they chose other race and wrote in “the name of their ‘home’ Latino country or group, to ‘explain’ their race – or ‘otherness’” (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 7).

In light of this, Rodriguez states that:

> The fact that these Latino referents were usually cultural or national-origin terms, such as Dominican, Honduran, or Boricua (i.e., Puerto Rican) underscores the fact that many Latinos viewed the question of race as a question of culture, national origin, and socialization rather than simply biological or genetic ancestry or color.” (2000, p. 7)

Thus, even though Sarah was filling out a jury selection form and not a census form, the discrepancies between how they defined race and ethnicity and how she defined them were there. Sarah’s discussion of the definitions of race and ethnicity acknowledge more of the overlapping qualities than the jury selection form did. This can be further observed in Sarah’s counter narrative when she states:

> It’s like going with Black and African American. Is one a race cause Black and that’s a race and then ethnicity is that the African American? Is it like slang
versus proper? You know, so that’s – that’s a hard question to answer. You know.

While Sarah focused on how the two terms are often used interchangeably, several other participants pointed out some of the different elements of ethnicity, such as culture and language. The idea that ethnicity has to do with culture can be identified when Latrice, a 32-year-old who self-identified as Black/Choctaw Indian, states that:

Race I would, well if I had to differentiate, ethnicity has a lot more to do with your culture to me. Um, it has a lot to do with the environment that you grew up with, um the lessons that you were taught, um even your speech. Um, race within itself is purely to me just your bloodlines; that’s what I would say the difference is. So, even though bloodlines I may be Native American, ethnically, I consider myself Black.

Like Latrice, Joy, a 28-year-old who self-identified as fifth-generation Japanese American added another element to ethnicity when she talked about language. She states:

I think also by language sometimes too - like two Asians- like Asian ethnic groups like Japanese, Chinese, Korean- people might think that our languages sound the same but ethnically, we can hear a big difference. But uh, they have the same characteristics- so I think language separates the race. (Joy)

While these excerpts acknowledge that there is something called race in our society, two other participants actually diminished the idea that race exists. This is evident when Sumeet, a 30-year-old who self-identified as Asian Indian, states:

Well there’s no such thing as race – but I would say that if you were going to describe race that it is physical features like African versus East Asian, versus
Caucasoid. But if you are going to do ethnicity, then that would be more cultural. So, South Asian would be cultural, or Spanish speaking Latino or European would be cultural. The ethnic.

Like Sumeet, Eric, who self-identified as Mexican American or Chicano American, also diminished the idea that race exists. He states:

Well I’d say that they, the race part, [pauses] –there’s one race, I thought. The human race. And ethnicity depends on your culture and your background, where you come from. (Eric)

Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as Multiracial Ethnic American, also points out the fact that race is a social construction. However, she adds another perspective to the definition of race and ethnicity when she talks about its relationship to power. She states “um, race is all about power structure. Race is a social construct- there really is nothing that ties people together racially. There is more genetic variation within a so called race than there is outside of it” (Ramona). After discussing how race is not really a good descriptor because of the fact that it is not genetically accurate, Ramona continues by stating that:

Um, cause race doesn’t really exist other than to give people power over other people and allow them certain liberties because of that power structure. Um, ethnicity is a little bit more accurate because it actually takes into account your culture and your family history and so it plays more into the ideas of what makes you you. You know ethnically, we are all American and that really defines how we view the world. And how we react with the world and so the racial aspect of American - because the country was built on race and the
division of people based on this artificial thing is very very different than pretty much anywhere else in the world because they view things ethnically speaking.

Ramona’s discussion of the relationship between power and racial and ethnic categorization systems is important because it hints toward some of the impacts that these categories have had on certain populations. Tiffany, a 38-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American, also discusses this when she talks about who actually gets to create the categories. She states:

Well, the advantage is always to the form maker. I mean, it’s always to the person who, to the institution that is trying to for whatever reason separate groups. Um, whether it’s for – it doesn’t always have to be good and bad purposes. Whether it’s again toward who do we give the money to and how much money and what groups should get more than the others and what about admissions to colleges and you know it’s just. There’s a lot of power in being the one to be able to make the box. (Tiffany)

This topic was also addressed by Lisa, a 30-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian. She discussed the impact of how racial and ethnic categories are defined and how that affects her identity. This can be identified when she states:

So, when I check the White Box, in a sense, I am granting the government permission to disregard the unique and meaningful history that my ancestors lived, such as when my great-grandmother emigrated to the U.S. (Wisconsin) from Norway BY HERSELF at 15 years of age to meet family that had already come. I don’t get to be Norwegian, because the categories say I am White. (Lisa)
Lisa continues by discussing how the racial and ethnic categorization system is related to issues of power. She states:

   The problem for me is that the powers that be, if you will, are telling me I am White, so what kind of identity issues might this cause? Well, do I get to celebrate my heritage or is the message that I should melt with all the other Whites and become THAT. You know?” (Lisa)

Lisa’s example works well as a counter narrative because it directly addresses the impact that labeling has had on Whites. Traditionally, from the perspective of the master narrative, it has been beneficial to be included in the White category because of all of the social and material privileges that have been associated with this category (DuBois, 1920; McIntosh, 1988; Roediger, 1991; Frankenberg, 1994). However, Lisa’s story offers an alternative perspective by discussing the negative consequences of “melting with all the other Whites.” This perspective has been discussed by several scholars (Liberson and Waters 1986; Waters, 1990; Alba, 1990; West; 1993) who have discussed the process of immigrants becoming White and described how that affected later generations.

For example, West (1993) discusses this process when he states “European immigrants arrived on American shores perceiving themselves as ‘Irish,’ ‘Sicilian,’ ‘Lithuanian,’ and so forth. They had to learn that they were ‘White’ principally by adopting the American discourse of positively valued whiteness and negatively charged blackness,” (p. 31). In other words as Leistyna (1997) points out “in their struggle to become ‘White’ – a process that was shrouded in the romanticized guise of ‘becoming American’ – immigrants identified less with their real roots and further disassociated themselves from any threat of ‘otherness’” (276). Several scholars (Liberson and Waters 1986; Waters, 1990; Alba, 1990) have studied White ethnic identity and
the symbolic attachment that many Whites have to their ethnic ancestry. In this same vein, Lisa’s counter narrative adds a useful dimension to the discussion of how race and ethnicity is defined by the master narrative because it provides an oppositional voice to a White category where all White ethnic groups are merged into one.

The counter narratives presented by Ramona, Tiffany, and Lisa also provide insight into how defining racial and ethnic categories function as racial projects. Since racial projects involve interpreting, representing, and explaining racial dynamics in an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular lines, the examples from these counter narratives demonstrate how resources can be distributed in certain ways simply because of how the categories are defined. This discussion is also evident when Tiffany and Ramona discuss the impact of the 2000 census decision to allow people to mark one or more racial category. In these excerpts, they specifically discuss the impact that this may have on how resources are distributed. This can be identified when Tiffany talks about how the multiracial category could impact her kids. She states:

And again, I go back to what’s going to happen with the kids because is this multiracial box going to be splintered off? What is that going to mean- for them? Is there going to be some sort of primacy given to certain classifications over others- certain mixings over others? (Laughs). (Tiffany)

While Tiffany presents this as a joking matter, her demeanor during the rest of the interview indicates that it is not a humorous subject; she repeatedly ponders how the information could be used. Ramona also highlights this when she points out how problematic it might be to check off multiple boxes in terms of the power structure embedded in these categorization systems. She states:
Umm, that’s a very touchy issue here in this country because by claiming all of your ethnic heritage it tends to dilute people’s view of the power of the inherited legacy of bigotry. And so, if we check all of the boxes then they will say there’s no need for affirmative action because you guys are all those. Well, no we’re not really. And so, I think that it is important in terms of self worth and self definition to be able to claim all of your ancestry without diminishing the legacy that racism has on this country. (Ramona)

The excerpts from the counter narratives of Ramona and Tiffany highlight another aspect of the way in which race and ethnicity are defined in the U.S.; they point to who gets to create the categories, how those categories are used, and what the categories are used for. In addition, when taken together, all of the excerpts from the participants’ counter narratives on how race and ethnicity are defined provide significant insight into some of the dimensions of the terms race and ethnicity. As a result, these counter narratives provide additional insight into the way the racial formation process works, the way that racial and ethnic categories are created, and the way in which certain bodies are represented and organized (Omi & Winant, 1994). The next section continues to provide additional insight into the way in which the master narrative works by focusing on stereotyping and some of the social rules that are used to classify people according to racial and ethnic categories.

Well…What are You? Stereotyping, Social Rules, and Racial and Ethnic Categories

In the counter narratives, several participants pointed out that another aspect of the master narrative involves how people try to categorize others according to racial and ethnic classification systems. Nancy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as “EnIrDanGerman or White,”
details this when she tells a story in her counter narrative about her aunt’s niece and nephew who are biracial (Asian and White). Nancy points out “the White relatives of these children think that they look more Asian, while the Asian relatives think that they primarily look White.” She goes on to state that “until my aunt had mentioned this to me, I never even thought about the fact that two different people could look at another person’s features and categorize them differently” (Nancy). This excerpt certainly highlights the base of this section, because it focuses on how people use different social rules and stereotypes to place other people in categories. Samantha, a 29-year-old who self identified as White/Caucasian, also includes a story in her counter narrative about how people are classified according to race and ethnicity when she talks about a set of biracial twins (one boy, one girl) who are Black and Japanese. Samantha points out that the boy identified as Japanese and the girl identified as Black. In light of this, she states:

When you consider these examples within the context of categorizing people who identify as multiracial, it begs the question whether categorization should be based on how the individual identifies personally or based on how others would identify them, or if those tend to be the same. Like the example of the African-American Japanese boy, he looked Black. If I didn’t know he had a Japanese mother, I would have assumed he was Black. Examples like this make putting people in pre-defined boxes hard. (Samantha)

While these examples offer insight into how people try to categorize others based on their perceptions and according to the master narrative, the examples also illuminate some of the social rules and guidelines that people use to make these decisions. These social rules and guidelines are important because it is in these spaces where people use their perceptions to classify others that we often catch glimpses of how the master narrative influences racial and
ethnic categorization. When participants discussed some of these social guidelines, they mentioned things like categorizing people according to stereotypes/physical appearances, language, status, and national/ethnic origin. One of the largest, and most commonly used, categories was classifying people according to stereotypes or physical appearances.

The social rule of classifying people according to stereotypical descriptions or their physical appearance can be identified when Joan, who self-identified as Asian American, tells a story about the first time that she met a colleague at the university where she works. She states:

Um, I went to her office to meet her and I announced myself to her secretary and I said, hi, I’m Joan Ganesvoort, I’m here to meet, um, I can’t remember her name anymore. And I didn’t realize that the person I was supposed to meet was standing right there, Vanessa was her name. She looked at me and said you can’t be Joan Ganesvoort and I said why? And she said, no, no, no Joan Ganesvoort, she’s tall and she’s got blue eyes. And so, she was looking at my – you know, my last name of Ganesvoort and envisioning me to be what she thought in her head was someone who was going to be this German and Dutch person, which I am, but I’m also Korean. So, it’s interesting how people formulate pictures in their head based on your name, or how your voice sounds, or how you speak possibly. (Joan).

In this example, Joan’s narrative demonstrates how stereotypes are often used to try to formulate images of what a person should look like according to how their name sounds. Additionally, it also demonstrates how people use physical characteristics to try to formulate ideas about what racial and ethnic category that person might belong to. Names play an important part in research on stereotypes and racial and ethnic classification because certain names can elicit different
treatment of individuals due to the stereotype or classification attached to them. Scholars have researched the impact of names on housing discrimination (Carpusor & Loges, 2006), employment opportunities (Bertand & Mullainathan, 2004), physical attractiveness (Hassebrauk, 1988; Erwin, 1995), and academic achievement/intelligence (Tompkins & Boor, 1980; Erwin, 1999), among other things.

However, along with the focus on a person’s name, physical characteristics play an important role as well. For example, this can be identified when Nancy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as “EnIrDanGerman or White,” states:

I remember once that someone asked what race I was because my eyes are kind of slanty (my wording, not theirs). My mother told the person that I’m part Native American (which is true on my grandfather’s side but we don’t know what tribe). The person said something like, ‘Oh, you can really tell’ as in ‘Oh, you can really tell that your child isn’t White’ and that irritated me later because my eyes are my grandmothers and she was as White as White can be – not that that matters. It just irritated me that people are ignorant. This, I’m sure, is minor compared to what other people go through.

Both of these excerpts provide examples of how people used stereotypes and physical characteristics to try to place the participants into racial and ethnic categories according to the master narrative. It is important to explore the role and function of these sorts of stereotypes in society because they offer insight into the understanding of the master narrative and how it influences thoughts about who belongs in which categories. Furthermore, these examples indicate opportunities to explore why thoughts rigidly conform to what it is believed that those categories should represent. Thus, as Omi and Winant (1994) would point out, these examples
demonstrate efforts to represent and organize certain human bodies according to the structure provided by the master narrative.

As Johnson (2006) points out “people tend to assume that they can identify characteristics such as race and gender simply by looking at someone” (p. 16). Furthermore, people routinely form quick impressions of the characteristics of others and “we may not realize how routinely we form such impressions until we run into someone who doesn’t fit neatly into one of our categories” (Johnson, 2006, p. 16). The idea of people not neatly fitting into one of the categories came up in several of the counter narratives where participants talked about how other people have a hard time classifying them racially and ethnically. For example, Felix, a 31-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American, also sheds light into how people often rely on physical characteristics. His example is interesting because he provides a slightly different perspective when he talks about how people often have a hard time categorizing his race/ethnicity. He states:

Growing up, and even to this day, I still have a lot of people – they don’t really know what I am, meaning what I am as in they can’t easily say, ‘well this person is a White person, this person is a Black person, Asian person, a Latino person, or Native American person. So, that will cause people to either feel uncomfortable around me, and they will have to ask a lot of questions, or it will cause them to feel maybe more –where they might have felt that I was more like them and so they just felt more comfortable around me. So, that was something that would work for and against me sometimes. And to this day, people still question- maybe they’re questioning because they’re curious or they’re questioning because if I am a certain thing then they’ll react a certain way. If
I’m not, then they’ll react some other way. So, they gotta know, and then they
know how to treat me, so to speak. (Felix)

Eric, a 29-year-old who self identified as Mexican American or Chicano American, also relates
to this in his counter narrative. He states:

I, for some reason, get labeled all kinds of different ethnicities. I’ve been called
Afghanistani-Afghani. Yeah, I haven’t got that since I’ve been out here [i.e., the
Midwest] but I’ve also been asked if I was – one woman said well are you
Indian and I said no and I just moved on. But then she said, no, no, no I meant,
there’s two Indians, there’s Indian from Asia and Indian from North America
and I looked at her [laughs] and I said I’m not either. (Eric)

Joy, a 28-year-old who self-identified as fifth-generation Japanese American also relates to the
confusion of others over her racial and ethnic heritage. She states:

First of all, people- they usually don’t know what race I am, they think I’m
interracial. I think they usually think I’m White and Asian. Or sometimes
people speak Spanish to me and also it depends on what season it is too. Like
when I’m more pale, then I’m more Asian. During the summer time, because I
tan real easy, people will speak Spanish to me sometimes and some people who-
Latino people have gotten mad at me like how come you don’t speak your
language. And I’m like, I’m Asian…So, it’s weird, I guess it depends on like
what I’m wearing, what season it is and things like that. (Joy)

The examples by Felix, Eric, and Joy all demonstrate how inconsistencies can occur when the
master narrative doesn’t fit with the real-life situation that is presented. Furthermore, these
testcases also reveal the rigid conformation to the stereotypes of what a person should be like
considering the way that these categories are presented in the master narrative. While people might not always be correct in the ways that they try to categorize others, as Samantha, a 29-year-old who self-identified as White/Caucasian, points out “it is something inherent that we do-placing people in categories to make sense of the world.” She continues by stating:

I know for me it’s just a natural thing if I see someone that I can’t ‘figure out’
what race they are - automatically I wonder about it and the funny thing is what I may automatically think is not necessarily right. (Samantha)

One of the major social rules that people use to try to place others into categories is their physical characteristics. In the counter narratives, several participants talked about the role that physical characteristics played when trying to classify people according to the racial and ethnic classification system in this country. One example of classifying people according to physical characteristics can be identified when Tiffany, a 38-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American, talks about how people would react to her when she was with her kids who are multiracial. She states:

In Glenview, (a progressive community) with a large interracial/ethnic population, I was having coffee with my young daughter when a woman approached me to say that she was impressed with my skills and attention as a babysitter. She did not believe that Elena who has lighter skin and gray eyes was my child. This was only the first incident, it happened many times during her first couple of years…Elena was a year when we moved here so, um, and so we – our facial structures weren’t very similar so – they are now, I mean you can look at her and say, yeah that’s my kid. And so many people made
comments about you’re such a great babysitter, you are treating those children so well. You know the parents would be so happy, blah, blah, blah. (Tiffany)

Tiffany goes on to point out that one particular instance stands out in her mind where one woman refused to believe that Elena was her daughter. She states:

And there was one woman who refused to believe that she was my child, whereas most people, I would be like well this is my daughter and they would be like ok, I’m sorry, blah, blah, blah. But this woman was like, well you can’t be her mother. I mean she was just like belligerent about it. I mean and then she made some comment about how you just don’t know where children get their looks these days. (laughs) She made some offhand remark where it’s like well clearly she’s insane, but you know you can’t you can’t hold on to that. And well, that has happened a lot. Now, I’ve been in the community a couple of years, people know me. I’m a stay at home mom, so I’m always with my girls and we don’t have those mistakes. But it happened quite a large number of times and I was always so happy that Elena was young because she doesn’t, she doesn’t remember, you know. (Tiffany)

Another example of how people try to categorize according to physical characteristics can be identified when Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as Multiracial Ethnic American, discusses one of her cousin’s children. During her counter narrative, she points out that there have been a lot of interracial relationships in her family’s history, but even the people who did not marry interracial still have children who appear to be multiracial. This is evident in the story that she includes about her younger cousin. She states:
Steven is tall with very fair hair and he has blue eyes and fair skin—he’s a little bit darker than I am. And people are like are you mixed? And he says no, both of my parents are Black. (laughs) So, it really confuses a lot of people. Um, people who come into our family reunion, they look at us like and you’re all related…yes we are thank you. (Ramona)

The confusion that people have can also be identified when Ramona mentions her annoyance with how other people often perceive her. After discussing the various ethnicities that people in her family resemble, she states:

I look pretty much Dominican or Puerto Rican. A lot of people confuse me for Puerto Rican or Dominican, um just because of how fair I am. Uh, my favorite kind of question, do you wear contacts? Like yes, but they’re not colored. My eyes are actually more green than they are blue- I mean more green than they are brown. Yeah, people get really confused by that. (Ramona)

Like Ramona, Sarah, a self-identified Hispanic of Mexican descent, also expresses annoyance about people’s curiosity regarding her racial and ethnic background. She states:

It is like at work, some people will ask like well what are you? And sometimes I go like ‘Excuse me.” And they say well what ethnic group are you? Are you Mexican or are you Hispanic? And they go are you Latina? But when they break it down like that, I tell them that I’m human. (Sarah)

This section was also interesting because during the discussion of physical characteristics, several people also talked about the one-drop rule (i.e., hypodescent), which involves additional social rules that are used when looking at a person’s physical characteristics. As Emily, who self-identified as Black, points out:
The way that works, they said if you had one drop of Black blood, then you were Black. I don’t think that is a very good thing. I think that you should be half. You should be – not just completely Black. You should be Black and White, or Black and Asian, or Black and Hispanic, or Black- you should have two different things to check.

Ashley, a 25-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American, also discusses this when I asked her why she chose the Black category on her forms even though she has some knowledge about other racial and ethnic ancestry in her family’s history. She states:

I was told that if you have one drop of Black in you then you are considered Black. One percent or whatever. However they put it and I don’t look mixed, I don’t even look like I mixed with different races, I look African American or Black. (Ashley)

Emily’s discussion of the one-drop rule is interesting, because she explains the overarching influence of the one-drop rule as a social structure despite the fact that she didn’t necessarily agree with how it works. Ashley’s excerpt adds to this because she brings up the role which physical characteristics play, pointing out that they often work as social rules, reinforcing what we already know about the master narrative. As Ramirez (1996) points out, the multiracial heritage of many African Americans has been concealed by the one drop rule and the fact that “these individuals are lumped into a monolithic Black category” (p. 55). Thus, as Ashley points out in her counter narrative, physical characteristics play an important role because they work in tandem with the stereotypes and social rules that are associated with the racial and ethnic categories seen on forms.
Another prime example of how this works with racial and ethnic categorization systems can be identified when Kathy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as African American/Native American, filled out her census forms. On the 1990 census form, she checked “Black or Negro.” When I asked her why she chose this category, she states “I categorized myself by, by what’s on the outside. So, the first thing people see is a Black/Negro or a Black person” (Kathy). However, when filling out the 2000 census, she checked the Black, African American, or Negro category and the American Indian or Alaskan Native category and wrote in Creek. In her explanation about this, she states “this census has more of a selection, therefore I was able to answer more ‘freely’ and explain myself” (Kathy). She continues this explanation when she fills out the fill-in-the-blank question. Here, she states “I am African American by historical stance, Native American by family heritage. African American/Native American because this is how I describe myself,” (Kathy). This example sheds light on how social rules, like the one-drop rule, along with the way that questions are structured on census forms, can influence a person’s categorization choices. Thus, social rules work to reinforce the master narrative and the structure of the racial and ethnic categories on official forms.

Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as Multiracial Ethnic American, also discusses the impact that the social rule of having one drop of blood had on her. She points out “to most people I am either Black or African American period. Because most people in this country (both Black and White) have bought into the one drop rule which is absolutely ludicrous,” (Ramona). She goes on to point out:

Unfortunately we still adhere to the idea that if a person has one drop of so-called Black blood, then they’re Black, which is absolutely ridiculous for a number of reasons. For the first place, it allows people who have not grown up
with the challenges of people who appear Black to um fall into things like affirmative action when they really don’t need it. And also, um it limits people who are like me who feel like I don’t really belong in one place or another. I’m in some sort of nebulous place in between. (Ramona)

Tiffany, a 38-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American, also discussed the impact that the one-drop rule can have when she talks about her children who are multiracial. She states:

Having three children has changed the way I understand and approach racial categories because now I am forced to choose one for them until the time that they can do so for themselves. Many have said that they should be defined as African American solely because they will have experiences which others from the White population (as their father) will not have and multiracial is too nebulous to have any meaning. (Tiffany)

While these three examples demonstrate how the one-drop rule influences the way in which people choose to check off racial and ethnic categories on forms, Eric, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American or Chicano American, demonstrates another instance where hypodescence and the one-drop rule plays a role. Eric states “oh, the other thing that I’ve noticed…is that Black Latino, Afro. American Latino’s become Black. They’re no longer, uh, they’re no longer Latino or Hispanic, they’re categorized as African American.” This example is interesting because it provides an alternate example of how Black Latino people are categorized according to the one-drop rule.

Although physical characteristics are one major social rule that people use to classify others according to racial and ethnic categories, there are other social rules that are prevalent as well. These include language, class status, and also national/ethnic origin. Eric discusses this
when he states that “well obviously appearance is one. I think language and appearances probably – and when I say appearances, I just also mean like if they are wearing a burka or something.” Rosario, a 19-year-old who self-identified as half Polish and half Mexican, also discusses several other social rules that are used. She states:

Well, if you see them, you can go obviously by their skin color – that’s one.

Um, sometimes by where they live, what kind of car they drive, just how much money they have usually tells some people what they are- because they don’t think that a lot of minorities will have a lot of money. Um, the job they have. I mean, unspoken rules like that can really tell you, clothes and that. (Rosario)

Latrice, a 32-year-old who self-identified as Black/Choctaw Indian, also points out that it is important to try to identify people in ways that they find appropriate. She discusses this when she talks about the labels that different communities prefer. She states:

Yeah, there are some social rules- I’ve learned in especially what I would consider Latino communities, um and even in what they consider the Asian community, if you’re Chinese versus Korean, or if you’re Mexican versus Puerto Rican, it’s an insult to them to lump them as one um, instead of identifying who they are. (Latrice)

These examples demonstrate the variety of social rules that are often used in society to organize people according to racial and ethnic classification systems. These social rules are important to focus on since they shed light on how the master narrative is perpetuated in everyday choices. The social rules, such as depending on physical characteristics, language, class status, etc., help to perpetuate existing stereotypes of who should fit into which category depending on the master narrative. In light of this, when looking at the social rules that help to uphold the master
narrative, they emerge as an aspect of racial formation since they helps us focus on several projects where human bodies and social structures are represented and organized (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Overall, the different themes that emerged in this chapter all work together to shed light on different elements of the master narrative. By focusing on these seemingly unconnected parts, they can be analyzed separately to discover how they work together to create the master narrative and how elements of whiteness are supported by using them. The next chapter begins to focus on how the counter narratives relate to the U.S. census forms and to elements of whiteness by focusing on notions of privilege.
Reflecting...

Grad. School: Listening to Samantha tell her story and wondering how long we will have to continue facing these types of questions. Samantha: “I’ve asked myself what external impact does this type of racial categorization (i.e., checking the box on a form) have? I’m not sure. Does the box you check change one’s ability to get a scholarship or a job based on diversity requirements? Does it change the way school districts are funded? Does it impact health screenings?”

In the midst of life experiences, our stories sometimes leave us with more questions than answers: questions about why things are the way they are, questions about how they might be changed, and often questions that lead to a deeper understanding of the world. While chapter 5 focused on some of the themes that emerged in the counter narratives as related to the master narrative, chapter 6 shifts the focus a bit and begins to focus more specifically on how the counter narratives relate to census forms and elements of privilege and whiteness. As Samantha’s excerpt points out, the themes that emerge in this section surround the relationship between checking off a category on a form and the privileges that might be attached to that process. Thus, this section starts out by focusing on the relationship between privilege, passing, and box-checking.

Privilege, Passing, and Box-Checking

One of the most noticeable areas that emerged in the 20 counter narratives surrounded the relationship between privilege, passing, and box-checking. As participants talked about their
experiences with racial and ethnic classification on census forms, they began to talk about how checking off certain categories is often associated with certain privileges or benefits. During the research, almost all of the participants told stories, recounted experiences, or discussed their feelings about the relationship that currently (and historically) exists between these concepts. During these discussions, examples surfaced from both ends of the spectrum, but what really unfolds is the complex nature of it all.

Before diving into the participants’ discussions of the relationship between privilege, passing, and box checking, it is important to take a step back to focus on how census data has been used in the past. When the census was first instituted in 1790, the racial and ethnic categorization system that was used on the forms was constructed in a binary structure – White versus other races/ethnicities (Rodriguez, 2000). Additionally, during that time, being categorized as White was also connected to citizenship, social status, economic and educational opportunities and a whole realm of other material and psychological benefits which non-White people were excluded from (DuBois, 1920; Harris, 1995; Lopez, 1996; Katznelson, 2005; Lipsitz, 2006). In concordance with this, a variety of social rules (i.e., hypodescent and the one-drop rule) and laws (i.e., citizenship and anti-miscegenation) were instituted and maintained to uphold these benefits and privileges and to provide substance for pseudoscientific research (Nobles 2000; Rodriguez 2000).

Thus, when looking at the use of census data from a historical perspective, it can be noted that early census data was used to enforce much of the discrimination and bigotry that could be found throughout society. However, during the civil rights period in the 1950s-1960s, the government instituted many different civil rights laws and census data became one of the primary tools used to enforce this legislation (Williams, 2006). As a result, while census data
was used to fuel pseudoscientific research in the past, its later uses surrounded providing data to make sure that civil rights legislation could be actualized. As Williams (2006) pointed out “in implementing and regulating the Civil Rights Act, for instance, racial statistics became important in order to identify the number of minorities employed in firms and the racial composition of schools” (p. 25). Although none of the participants discussed this shift in detail, the rhetoric surrounding their discussion of the relationship between privilege, passing, and box-checking sheds light on how it manifests itself in everyday discourse.

One of the most obvious ways that this showed up in the counter narratives was in the participants’ discussion of how privilege is connected to both Whites and minorities. For example, Lisa, a 30-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian, states:

Well, I think this is not a simple issue. Clearly, in most social, economic, and political realms, White folks are privileged over others. From my understanding, the racial hierarchy is something like: White, Asian, Hispanic, Black. However, for the purpose of scholarships and other affirmative action related issues, it seems to me that non-White folks are privileged. Women may also be privileged over men.

Latrice, a 32-year-old, who self-identified as Black/Choctaw, also addresses this in her counter narrative when she points out that:

There’s definitely a certain level of privilege to the White male. Um, whether people want to admit it or not, it’s just obvious. Um, that I would say – well let me qualify that, in the traditional corporate America it is, in the school systems it is. But then nowadays as an entrepreneur, you might get a lot more privilege being female or being a minority as far as assistance and help and things of that
nature. Um, but yeah, all and all though (laughs) we wouldn’t need that assistance
and help if it wasn’t a situation where the White male wasn’t allowed all those
privileges.

These two excerpts get to the heart of how the participants talked about the relationship between
privilege, passing, and box-checking in their counter narratives. As both Lisa and Latrice point
out, the difference lies in whether one is talking about the period before affirmative action or
after it. Samantha, a 29-year-old who self-identified as White/Caucasian, also discusses this
when she points out in her counter narrative that Whites have historically benefited from the
years of building a system that benefits Whites over others. She goes on to state “I know there
are benefits to being categorized as White. There are also now benefits to being categorized as a
minority due to affirmative action, diversity programs, etc.” (Samantha). In light of this, the
discussion of privilege, passing, and box-checking still exists within the binary structure, with
Whites on one side and other races/ethnicities on the other. The counter narratives provide an
opportunity to see how participants talked about the privileges that are associated with the White
category and the privileges that are associated with the minority category. The next section
begins this discussion by focusing on the White category and the privileges the participants
associated with it.

The White Category and Privilege

The idea that there are privileges associated with the White box can be identified very
clearly when Kathy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as African American/Native American,
states in her counter narrative “I think it’s a benefit to checking the White box, but not a benefit
to checking the Black box.” This sentiment was shared by other participants as well. The notion
of the White category being connected to certain privileges and benefits rests on the idea that by checking off the White category, whoever is reviewing it would be more likely to give out benefits than if a minority category were checked. During the research, this idea surfaced mostly when participants were talking about historical situations since they often mentioned benefits for minorities when talking about affirmative action and the post-Civil Rights Era. For example, Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as a Multiracial Ethnic American, states “I think the perception is that it’s there. That there is a perception to checking Black or checking multiracial or checking something other than White, but the reality is that there is a definite advantage to being White in America.”

This sentiment is also shared by Sumeet, a 30-year-old who self-identified as Asian Indian. During his counter narrative, he discussed the historical element of box-checking and the White category and its relationship to White privilege. Sumeet offers an interesting perspective because he points out the mutually reinforcing relationship between the categories that are listed on forms and the social structures that support them. For example, this emerges in Sumeet’s counter narrative when he states:

I mean, I would say that White is the most privileged- but I don’t know if they get that advantage from checking the box. They just kind of already have the advantage. I think the advantage is outside the- it’s not based on the form, it’s just how everything is set up.

Despite the fact that Sumeet points out (correctly) that the advantage doesn’t just come from checking the box, his excerpt highlights how social structures can work in tandem with official forms to reinforce notions of privilege for certain groups. Historically, examples of this can be identified through the mutually reinforcing relationship between citizenship and census forms,
since a person had to be White to be a citizen in the U.S. (Lopez, 1996). It can also be identified in the way that anti-miscegenation laws restricted interracial sex and marriage which was directly related to how categories were constructed on forms, since for most of the census’s history the categories were constructed in a mutually exclusive way (Lopez, 1996).

Although the examples above surfaced in counter narratives from participants who self-identified as non-White, several self-identified White participants also acknowledged the connection between whiteness and privilege. For example, although Elizabeth, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian, doesn’t actually use the word privilege in her counter narrative, she indirectly acknowledges it when she states:

Man, I think White people have a much easier life overall than other races. It’s hard to describe why and it sucks that I think that’s true but White people don’t have to fight stereotypes nearly as often as other races or worry about someone automatically classifying them as this or that just because of their skin color. I don’t think White people have to worry about a lot of things that other races do have to think about and consider in life.

This can also be observed when Nancy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as “EnIrDanGerman or White,” states:

I think that White people, historically have been more privileged. And probably still are. Probably, who am I kidding?...I would like to think it doesn’t make a difference (and they say it doesn’t) but it’s hard for me to believe that. I always wonder if that gives me an edge where there wouldn’t otherwise be one.
These two examples by Elizabeth and Nancy demonstrate the complexity involved in the discussion on the relationship between privilege and box-checking, since in the counter narratives it was something brought up by participants of various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

As the discussion of privilege, passing, and box-checking continued to emerge in the counter narratives, several participants also talked about concrete examples of how they felt privilege was connected to the White category. Rosario, a 19-year-old who self-identified as half Polish and half Mexican, states:

There’s definitely mortgage for sure and I know banks because in school we learned about this. That if you check that you’re White, you are more likely to get a mortgage loan or just loans in particular. So, I mean being White is again a greater privilege.

Eric, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American or Chicano American, states:

I just read like last week or two weeks ago that the NAACP is looking into one of the huge mortgage lenders saying that they were specifically targeting uh, African Americans and then after that they were targeting Hispanics to give them these high rate, adjustable rate mortgages.

Latrice, a 32-year-old who self-identified as Black/Choctaw Indian, also identified a specific example of how the White category is connected to privilege. This can be seen when she states:

I don’t think that anyone would be honest about it if they were reviewing those forms but that’s just the reality of where we are. There’s going to be an assumption that you have good credit and you know, that you can handle it. Or you might get some extra privilege that someone else might get scrutinized on.

(Latrice)
Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identifies as multiracial Ethnic American, provides another example in her counter narrative when she talks about how her sister had been driving for a while and when she stopped to get a hotel room, the guy went to the back and came back out and said “no, we don’t have any rooms available.” She continues the story when she states:

And so, she um, found it kind of fishy so she had me call and ask if they had rooms available for that night. Now, we don’t sound Black, and we don’t sound Latino so when I called and he said sure we have plenty of rooms available, I said that’s really interesting because my sister was there fifteen minutes ago and you told her you had none. So, had she been White, would she had had the same reaction from the guy? Probably not. But it happens all the time, this is not an uncommon thing. (Ramona)

The examples by Rosario, Eric, Latrice, and Ramona point to mortgage applications, bank loans, assumptions of good credit, and housing as examples of how the White category is connected to notions of privilege. Another example of how the White category is connected to notions of privilege can be identified when Ramona tells a story in her counter narrative about her mother’s relationship with a White lady that she was trying to help out. Although this excerpt is a bit long, her example is useful because it is crucial in identifying the psychological benefits (DuBois, 1920; Lipsitz, 2006; Roediger, 1991) that are associated with whiteness. She states:

One of the things that amazed me is the power and privilege that skin color allows people. Um, we, my mom picks up stray people. Some people pick up stray animals, my mom picks up stray people. And there is this one woman who isn’t really bad- but she is in bad shape. She’s lost her children, she will never get them back- in and out of jail for drugs and alcohol for various issues. And this woman,
I was giving her a ride home after she had detoxed at my mom’s house for a couple of hours one night. And she looked at me and she said, you’re very pretty for a Black girl. And, it really hit home to me because here I am two college degrees, working on a university campus, working on my third degree and she still thinks that she’s in more of a position of power or better than I am simply because she’s White. And I’m like that is – that is the power of race, that is what race really is, it’s that power hold that allows people an assumption. (Ramona)

Although Ramona’s example is not specifically about checking off a box on a form, it is important to discuss because it highlights the psychological benefits that are associated with being a part of the White category.

In his discussion of the psychological or public wage that was used to compensate Whites, Du Bois (1935) describes these psychological benefits as concrete things that often emphasized the status of Whites and often resulted in concrete rewards. Roediger (1991) describes these benefits or pleasures of whiteness as the *wages of whiteness* and he says that “status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships” (p. 13). Thus, he argues that these benefits helped White workers in the North and South accept their class positions because they were able to fashion their identities as being “not slaves and as not Blacks” (Roediger, 1991, p. 13). Similarly, Ramona’s example provides insight into how checking the White box may serve as one of those psychological wages because it demonstrates the relationship between the White category and privilege.
Whiteness as a Liability

While numerous scholars focus on the many types of privileges that are associated with the White category and being White (Roediger, 1991; McIntosh, 1988/1997; Lipsitz, 2006), a couple of participants actually talk about how checking the White box can be viewed as a liability as well. For example, Lisa’s counter narrative presents an alternative understanding to the way that the White category is often presented in the master narrative because she talks about whiteness as a liability instead of as privilege. Although this is most clear when she is talking about the context where she grew up, it can also be identified when she talks about checking off racial and ethnic boxes on forms. For example, it is apparent when she states “well, I have sometimes felt that being White was a liability, like when applying to a scholarship or job. So, I have not checked the race boxes before, as terrible as it sounds” (Lisa).

Lisa’s feeling is not unfounded. In his article on identity politics and whiteness, Gallagher (2003b) notes that many of the White students in his study felt this way as well. He states that “a majority of White students argued that we live in a meritocracy where non-Whites have every advantage Whites do and, in some cases, more opportunity because of affirmative action” (p. 308). Gallagher goes on to point out that “this zero-sum game mentality implies that what is ‘great’ for minorities must be a handicap for Whites” (p. 308). Michael, a 40-year-old who self-identified as Latino/White, specifically discusses this when talking about the fact that because he has more White characteristics than Latino characteristics and a non-Latino last name, people often mistake him for being just White. He talks about whiteness as a liability in his counter narrative when discussing the relationship between minority categories and privilege. He states:
Hypothetically if I was up for a position at work and of course they would perceive me as White- because I am White and I was up against an African American, I think probably- and we were both equally qualified for the position, I think probably because of affirmative action the African American or the Black person would get it. (Michael)

The idea of whiteness as a liability is also present when Ramona talks about her job working with a program that recruits diverse freshman students at a university to offer them additional support services. She states:

More and more, I’m finding people just not filling them out because it’s optional because they see some programs like the one I work with as putting them at a disadvantage if their White. So, they just won’t put anything- which is not the case. (Ramona)

Lisa also discussed whiteness as a liability in her counter narrative. However, for Lisa, many of her feelings are related to the context in which she grew up. In her counter narrative, she discusses how she grew up in an environment where there were very few Whites. As a result, when talking about her background, she states “being White has always been a liability that I have been overtly and covertly punished for” (Lisa). She further explains her background when she states:

Growing up in the Hawaiian Islands as a White person was no easy task. I was fortunate to have many blessings and a loving family, yet the day to day uncertainty and anxiety of being a Haole in a local world was very challenging. I was verbally and physically attacked by others in my classes starting from the 4th grade for being a “F**king Haole.” I started taking karate lessons at this point so
that I would be able to defend myself effectively when boys and girls tried to bully me. This continued on and off, some schools worse than others, until I was about fifteen. I suppose I moved high school’s so often (I attended three and did home school) that I didn’t have an opportunity to be really targeted as a teenager.

I got very good at running away from my problems. (Lisa)

After discussing how she adjusted to living in Chicago and California where there is greater diversity, she talks about how living in Washington where there are more Caucasian people has impacted her. For example, she states:

So, I feel that I have different experiences of whiteness depending on who I am interacting with and what they act like towards me. Now, when I go day to day, I feel like the majority, which is interesting. When you see someone who is not White, you notice it way more. When I was in Hawaii, it struck me how few White people there are. (Lisa)

This shift is interesting because it highlights how context plays a role in the manner in which people perceive their racial and ethnic ancestry. Additionally, her story presents an alternative understanding to the way that the White category is often represented in the master narrative.

Another example of how White identity emerged as a liability was discussed when Ramona talks about the backlash of the 2000 census in terms of how the data would be impacted by people checking off more than one category. Many civil rights groups felt that their groups might lose funding because of a decrease in numbers (Williams, 2006). Within that debate, there were many Whites who felt that they were losing out as well simply because of their race. This can be identified in Ramona’s narrative when she states:
But then you have situations where you see that the backlash to that is that there are many Whites who are just as poor and underprivileged in many different ways feeling like well hold on a second, I didn’t create this problem and now all of a sudden I’m having all of these people walking …it was Obama’s speech from- where was he? I forgot- was it the North Carolina speech- where you have Whites who are disenfranchised. That they are in the back of the line now and all of these minority groups are ahead of them because they happen to be White- you know economically they are not as privileged as others who might be able to check a [minority] box. (Ramona)

Overall, research on whiteness and White identity often talks about the privileges that are associated with whiteness. However, the excerpts from Lisa and Ramona’s counter narratives should push scholars to begin to reevaluate this assertion because they cast doubt on the construction of White identity as simply a privileged standpoint. Likewise, these excerpts also highlight the many ways in which racial identities shift and change over time – so they may be providing additional insight into the realms of a near-future racial project. As Gallagher (2003b) states, “no doubt many Whites do not think about their whiteness, but I would argue that they are increasingly in the minority” (p. 315). As a result of this, it is important to begin to examine alternative stories and experiences in order to fully understand the shift that is currently in progress.

Minority Categories and Privilege

Part of the discourse on whiteness as a liability surrounds the fact that since the Civil Rights Era, many people believe the minority category has been linked with privileges and
benefits due to civil rights legislation. As a result of this, the use of racial and ethnic categories on census forms has been directly tied to this legislation since census data is often used to help enforce civil rights legislation. This perspective surfaces among several participants in the counter narratives and was usually connected to discussions of affirmative action. As a result, this section discusses several excerpts from counter narratives where participants point out the relationship between the minority category and benefits/privileges. For example, Eric, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American or Chicano American, directly addresses this when he states:

And then I think that in employment it is beneficial in many ways, uh if you’re a minority right now – uh for better or worse, I think that definitely because things are so – they’re so complicated I guess – I think that many Caucasians have a harder time today because of things like affirmative action and the whole quotas – we have to have two minorities in the office. So, I think that the minorities benefit from that and I think that sometimes that hurts the Caucasians.

Michael, a 40-year-old who self-identified as Latino/White, also discusses the relationship between minority categories and privilege. In his counter narrative, he discusses how he thought that he might be passed over for a job if he was up against an African American with the same qualifications because he looks more White than Latino. In his counter narrative, he goes on to state:

Especially, if they were needing another Black person to fill a quota. And in situations like that, I don’t think that it is fair because if I’m just as qualified as the next person and they get it because of the color of their skin. That, I don’t think is fair. I think that we should have um, how do I put it – we should have
equal opportunity for the job – we should have an equal chance of getting it.

Because if I’m just as qualified as him and he’s just as qualified as me and when you cut us we both bleed red, I should have the same chance and opportunity as him. (Michael)

Michael’s excerpt is interesting because it shows the impact of the changes in how census data has been used throughout history. Now that census data is often used to enforce civil rights legislation, Michael’s discussion of how the minority category is connected to privilege sheds light on how the master narrative has been forced to adapt to the Civil Rights Movement. His discussion details the emergence of a new racial project – one where whiteness is a liability and being a minority is a privilege. This discourse highlights this as a racial project because like Omi and Winant’s (1994) definition, it is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, and explanation of racial dynamics and it details how resources have been reorganized and redistributed along particular racial lines (p. 56).

Several other participants also discuss the relationship between minority categories and privilege. For example, Joy, a 28-year-old who self-identified as a fifth-generation Japanese American, discusses this relationship in terms of being chosen for a job. In her counter narrative, she talks about how it depends on the context and how in certain contexts it might be beneficial to be a minority.

Um, I think it depends on what boxes you’re checking where. Like certain institutions, or opportunities, it might be helpful that you are of an ethnic group because you can gain access. Other ones it might not be as helpful, but I think now a days with globalization and we’re interacting with different countries, if you apply for a job and they see that um you are a Latino person and say that
they’re trying to build some kind of connection with Latino communities or like they – or like a Latino market then just being of that ethnicity you might have a better chance. (Joy)

Rosario, a 19-year-old who self-identified as half Polish, half Mexican, also briefly discusses this in her narrative when she talks about how minorities might have some privileges in contexts where there is a need to promote diversity. This can be identified when she states:

Well, when colleges did, you know if you were a minority then you had much more of a chance to get in- affirmative action and all that. But, they took that away so that’s not anymore [laughter both sides]. If you want more diversity, I guess, in anything then- I guess that would be a privilege- but they’re not really promoting diversity. In most areas, they don’t really care- they may say they do but it’s not really – it’s false advertising. (Rosario)

Finally, Cristina, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American, continues the discussion of diversity and false advertising by talking about how minorities might be privileged because of this in certain contexts. She states:

I think you get preferential treatment if you check White versus like even if you’re White and mixed with something else. If they see something checked other than White, then they’re like well- if we need some ethnic mix, in our- let’s say it’s for a loan, then they are like well we have all of these White guys, I think we need to pick an other so that way we are not seeming to be racist or whatever. We have to be multicultural so let’s get an Asian, and let’s get two Blacks, or maybe you know let’s get one of those Mexican or Hispanic people. You know for
diversity (laughs). I think that’s how they use those honestly. If they ask, there’s a reason why. (Cristina)

While the excerpts above focus on employment opportunities and business scenarios, Joan discusses how this plays out in educational settings as well. Joan’s discussion of the relationship between box-checking and minority categories is interesting because she highlights a new aspect of the discussion when she talks about the difference between checking the box because it embraces your ancestry or heritage and just checking the box to try to get benefits or privileges from it. She states:

Yeah, again, I think it goes back to what are they checking the boxes for. But I definitely think that in my work environment now, in higher education, I think there’s a lot of benefits for students to check the [minority] box because we in this – I feel like society is at this point right now where everybody wants to be diverse, they want a diverse workforce, they want you know diverse students. Everyone wants diversity so there are so many times when we get contacted where someone says we really want some – whatever- I mean name a category and they want those students. So, I think there’s a lot of benefits in this venue for students to truly put what their ethnicities are and what their multiple layers are because then it can help us identify them for needs. (Joan)

As Joan continues in her counter narrative, she points out the relationship between minority categories and privilege through a discussion of scholarships. She states:

Even though scholarships are technically not supposed to be geared towards certain groups –they’re still out there. We have donors who give money and they’re alumni donors who only want their money to go to certain groups for
certain reasons and you have to find ways to do it in order to get those funds because it’s a way to help that group of students but at the same time, it’s a way to help another group of students because by getting in these extra funds you can take other funds and move them elsewhere so it kind of helps everybody to be able to help each other. So, I think it is kind of advantageous, but I think it goes back to are you using your ethnicity to get benefits or are you truly embracing your ethnicity. (Joan)

Joan’s excerpt is interesting because it highlights the thin line between checking off a box to receive a privilege or benefit, versus checking it off because that is how one views one’s self and wants to embrace ancestry or heritage. This idea of checking off a box just to obtain extra benefits or privileges will be explored in more detail in the section on passing and privilege.

Overall, in the excerpts above, participants focused on contexts or settings where minorities might benefit from checking a minority category that is associated with certain privileges; however, two participants pointed out another side to this story in their narratives. In their counter narratives, Eric and Sarah discuss how some minorities relied on the connection between privilege and minority categories which sometimes resulted in expectations of preferential treatment. In her counter narrative, Sarah, a 41-year-old who self-identified as a Hispanic of Mexican descent, states that “sometimes you have people who want to try to use that as a crutch rather than using it to be who they are and benefit them.” The notion of preferential treatment was also discussed by Eric, who self-identified as Mexican American or Chicano. In his counter narrative, he points out that while he thinks that the White category is the most privileged, he also thinks that:
Some minorities they, they go the wrong route in my opinion where they, they want something given to them- or not handed to them- but they want preferential treatment – or they expect it. Like oh, I’m a, I’m applying for the police department, I’m a young Latino woman. I’m going to get it because they need a woman, and it’s like, that’s not – you know you should do it on merit and that type of thing. (Eric)

Like Michael’s earlier comment of “we should have equal opportunity for the job – we should have an equal chance of getting it,” the excerpts by Sarah and Eric point to the notion that people should not rely on the privilege that is associated with a certain category; opportunities should be based on people’s qualifications.

Passing for Privilege

However, even though the ideas of equal opportunity and equality came up several times in the counter narratives, several participants point out that people often try to use their racial and ethnic backgrounds to their advantage. For example, Felix, a 31-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American, points out that it is like a game. He states:

Yeah. It’s all a game. I mean, you gotta know how to play the game. And you gotta know the rules of the game, and you can understand that checking certain boxes may be more beneficial to you than others. And maybe in certain situations you want to check a certain box because it may help you or benefit you in this area. And in this area, you may choose not to do it. So, it’s a game you gotta play.

(Felix)
While Felix is talking specifically about checking off racial and ethnic boxes on official forms, this discussion in his counter narrative is reminiscent of the historical notion of passing. Historically, passing was often related to minorities who deliberately passed as White in order to obtain certain privileges or benefits that otherwise would not be available to them. In this setting, a person does not use their ambiguous physical characteristics to lead people to believe that they are from a different racial and ethnic category; this is a slight form of remote passing where people might check a certain box to lead people to believe that they are associated with a certain group. Historically, passing involved a person living a significant part of their daily life or their entire lives passing as someone from another group. In terms of box-checking, passing might be too strong of a word for some; but when people deliberately check off a category in order to obtain additional benefits or privileges, it does represent the same underlying principles.

In terms of passing, privilege, and box-checking, this remote passing (or passing on paper) can also occur when a person checks a box to emphasize a certain part of their heritage that they do not normally claim. Thus, the idea of remote passing has the same underlying principle that passing has had historically. It demonstrates that people understand the benefits that are embedded in a racialized system where certain categories are given more advantages than others. In his article, “Who’s Black, Who’s White, and Who Cares,” Luther Wright Jr. (2003) discusses instances where people played up a part of their heritage in order to obtain privileges, and he also delves into modern-day examples of racial fraud. For example, in reference to the 1985 movie “Soul Man,” Wright Jr. talks about instances of soulmaning or instances of “Whites passing for Black to gain employment, education and political opportunities” (p. 182). As detailed in the sections above, the relationship between box-checking and privilege is not limited to a Black/White issue, so instances of this remote form of passing
could happen on a number of different platforms (e.g., Whites passing as minorities, minorities passing as Whites, minorities passing as other minorities, etc.).

Several discussions of passing emerge in the counter narratives as participants recall experiences where people either played up a part of their racial/ethnic background or knowingly checked a box even though it was not a part of their racial/ethnic background. Sumeet, a 31-year-old who self-identified as Asian Indian, discusses an example of a friend who passed as White. He states:

I mean. I’ve never really done anything like that so I don’t think I could get away with it at all. But I have, I have heard of people doing that. Like I know some, like a friend of mine – they’re, he’s Native American but he’s really light skinned and he says that sometimes he checks off White because they might give him loans, to get by, or to get jobs even. (Sumeet)

Latrice, a 32-year-old who self-identified as Black/Choctaw Indian, also discusses this when she talks about her personal experiences when applying for college and funding. She states:

Ok, the first one that came up was actually my personal experience when I was applying for college and for funding. Technically, when we dig all the way back, my background is Choctaw and Chickasaw Indian which is basically the Oregon area. But, because I haven’t grown up in a tribe and in that culture, um, technically I can say that I’m an Indian but I couldn’t necessarily prove it in the sense that would be necessary to obtain funding or to be considered um an Indian as far as the legal standards are concerned. The other side of it is, I grew up in the Black neighborhoods. I think that because of that, because of me growing up in the Black neighborhoods, that’s how I had identified myself up until this point.
Up until I learned otherwise, and so when it came to filling out those types of applications, I just labeled myself as African-American although I don’t have African American in me… I could of went one way and got different types of funding, I could of got scholarships one way as much as the other way. And there wasn’t really an option of being both. So, that was one of the first things that I thought about. (Latrice)

These two excerpts provide examples of how people checked a box that was not representative of their racial/ethnic background in order to obtain additional privileges. In Latrice’s example, she actually points out one of the current inconsistencies in the way that racial and ethnic classification systems are used today. She discusses how certain privileges can be conferred on individuals based on their ancestry. However, for the Native American category, individuals often need to have legal documentation to prove their Native American ancestry, where that is not the case for other categories such as Black.

In the counter narratives, several other examples came up regarding the relationship between passing, privilege, and box-checking. These examples provide illustrations of instances where a person played up a part of their heritage in order to gain extra privileges and benefits. One example of this can be identified when Michael, a 40-year-old who self-identified as Latino/White, talks about the conversation that he had with his aunt during his senior year of high school about checking the Hispanic box. In his counter narrative, Michael points out that around this time, he started filling out financial aid and college applications and he would check the White box because up until that point, he had always considered himself to be White. He states:
So, that was an enlightening conversation. Very enlightening (laughs) because I was informed that I was not White, I was half Mexican. I was denying myself the part of my heritage that was entitled to me- yada yada- so forth- so. So, and basically, being Hispanic as the boxes on the thing, I could be entitled to more financial aid when it comes to college and education because of my ethnic background. Or there could be scholarships that I could apply for because of the Hispanic- you know that a regular White person could not get because they didn’t meet that requirement because they weren’t Hispanic. Yeah, so from that point, I switched my box to Hispanic (laughs). (Michael)

Another example of how someone played up part of their heritage can be identified when Cristina, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American, discusses the example of a girl that she went to school with in college. She states:

I’ve seen it in college. Yep. A girl was Filipino when she applied but she got upset when she got stuff from the multicultural group inviting her to luncheons and dinners and stuff. ‘I’m not blah, blah, blah.’ Well, what did you put on your application form, well that’s why they are sending you stuff. It’s like it was good enough to be multiracial when you applied, but it’s not now. (laughs) What happened? Did you lose a race? I find that interesting, but you know. (Cristina)

Finally, Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as a Multiracial Ethnic American, states:

And a lot of times too, the, the, there are other people who think that they are being put at an advantage if they self define as Latino or Black if they’re biracial and they’ve been reared within the White society. And then socially they are so-
called White. So, it creates a false impression of what is – what we’re really striving for with affirmative action.

In these excerpts by Michael, Cristina, and Ramona, one can see how the relationship between privilege, box-checking, and passing works together. As Cristina states in her counter narrative, “when it is convenient for them to be an ethnic group then they will use it, but if it is not, then they will not claim to be a member of an ethnic group.” Overall, these examples clarify some of the ways that racial classification systems relate to aspects of privilege. While this section talks about how people can (as Felix describes it) play the game to their advantage, Tiffany, a 38-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American, discusses some of the dilemmas and idiosyncrasies involved in this relationship. In her counter narrative, Tiffany talks about this when discussing how she has to check off boxes for her 5-year-old daughter who is multiracial.

She states:

But getting her geared for school each year now we have to fill out all the forms and it is right there in bold face – you know – what is she? Now, the forms, yeah I can check off White or Black and now there’s multiracial, so I do that, whatever that means. And she qualifies for a whole host of scholarships and things because she’s multiracial and you know we struggle, we struggle with that. How to- there are ways to work the system and that’s one of the ways. And it’s surely being done. But, that’s – you know. (Tiffany)

When she continued talking about this in her counter narrative, Tiffany discusses how these privileges relate to history, racism, and prejudice but ends with her overall disappointment with the way that the system is constructed. She states:
And like I said, I understand the history and I have been in many situations and I have confronted bold face racism and like I really feel that this is a problem that hasn’t gone away, but it is morphing into something else. Yes, and now too – I see people trying to hold on to an old way which doesn’t seem to work. But at the same time, the – what seemed to be a solution to it has been to create this big huge sort of nebulous category where anybody and everything can fall into it and it doesn’t – you know what does that do for a person’s identity. It doesn’t have any meaning whatsoever. So, I’m just confused about it. I’m confused. (Tiffany)

This example is helpful and useful as a counter narrative to the master narrative because it provides us with an alternate understanding of the relationship between box-checking, privilege, and passing. This relationship and the peculiarities that exist within it are also addressed by Ramona, who states “So, it really makes me wonder what this classification is going to lead to? Anything and everybody can go in there, I mean literally (laughs).” Ramona’s observation is very valuable to the discussion of box-checking, privilege, and passing because if society gets to the point where the majority of people want to highlight their multiracial/multiethnic backgrounds, then the previous dichotomy of having privilege being connected to either White or minority categories may be turned inside out. Thus, Tiffany’s example and Ramona’s observation offer constructive feedback into this issue because they represent a potential future racial project (Omi & Winant, 1994) that might serve to propel society outside of the historical constraints of whiteness.
Skin Color and Privilege

While the examples in the section above focus on how checking a certain box can be related to privileges or benefits, this section briefly addresses the role that skin color plays. In her earlier story about the experience that she had with the White woman that her mother had befriended, Ramona points out the role that skin color plays in who obtains certain privileges in our society. In her example, Ramona talks about “the power and privilege that skin color allows people” and she uses this statement to refer to the White woman’s skin color allowing her the privilege of thinking that she was better than Ramona. Felix, a 31-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American, also discusses the role of skin color and how that relates to privileges and benefits. He states:

I definitely think people that are White, people that are lighter complexioned than darker complexioned, definitely. There’s no question in my mind that those groups of people will receive benefits and privileges that darker people will not receive. I’m 100% convinced of that. I believe that myself, being a lighter skinned person, I believe there are privileges and benefits that I’ve received in my life that darker skinned people haven’t received. And I’m 100% convinced of that in my life. I’m 100% convinced of that. (Felix)

Like Ramona, Felix points out that historically there has been a relationship in our society between privilege and skin color. This relationship is deeply rooted in the history of U.S. race relations and during slavery where people who had the lightest/Whitest skin received more benefits than those with darker skin. This topic is discussed by Ramona in her counter narrative. She states:
Our country was established that way. Our country was set up on a system of racism. And it started even before then with the colonization of Africa and the stealing of the African people. By defining them as less than human it was okay to then subject them to behaviors that you would not subject other human beings to. Um, and so that carried over into American society when the country was founded. And, even the stratification that happened with dark-skinned Blacks versus fair skinned Blacks and field slaves versus house slaves. Um, there’s, there’s a huge, huge stratification based upon race and privilege and the fairer you are and the more closer to White you are the more privilege you have regardless of your socioeconomic status. (Ramona)

These examples by Felix and Ramona of how privilege is related to skin color and whiteness are important to discuss in the greater context of privilege, passing, and box-checking since they play a large role in the everyday lives of many people. These examples are also important to discuss because small instances like these work in and of themselves as racial projects that uphold and support the larger structure of the master narrative and the way that whiteness has historically been connected to privilege. The next chapter continues to explore several minor instances that came up in the counter narratives which work against the master narrative by exposing several cracks in its foundation.
CHAPTER VII: SHATTERING THE PAST: CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE MASTER NARRATIVE

Reflecting...

Grad. School: Listening to Kathy’s story and really thinking about how embedded whiteness is in our current categorization system. Kathy: “And also too, I mean and this is not against anybody, any race or anything but why the White one got to be first. You know, it’s just even the way that they categorize. I mean let’s do something a little bit more logical—like alphabetical, then Black would be first... But I’m like White? That starts with a W.” (Kathy)

In their article “Critical Rhetoric and Continual Critique,” McKerrow and St. John (2009) point out that in the practice of a critical rhetoric “the assumption is that a critique may move beyond mere criticism (McKerrow, 1991) and incorporate an interrogation of the assumptive ground from which the critical analysis arises” (p. 322). They go on to state “thus, if one is working within the constructs of a democratic state, the assumptions that ground democracy are as open to critique as are the actions that emanate from that state” (McKerrow and St. John, 2009, p. 322). In other words, sometimes one must take a step outside of the forest to see all of the trees and sometimes they have to hear the other side of the story to get the whole account.

While telling their stories about racial and ethnic categorization in this country, several of the participants offer insightful critiques that required me to take a step outside of the master narrative to see things from a different perspective. In these moments, their counter narratives reminded me of why critical race theory’s use of storytelling is so valuable in getting the complete picture. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001) point out, “powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity” (p. 43).
In light of this, examples like the one from Kathy above are crucial to understanding perceptions outside of the master narrative of race and ethnicity in this country. While the example from Kathy’s counter narrative demonstrates a simple, but very visible, way that whiteness manifests itself in the current categorization system, her critique was not the only one. This perspective is shared by Cristina, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American. In her counter narrative, she states “honestly, when you see how they list things, they don’t have the Black on top, White, Asian. No, it’s always White is the first choice and then maybe Black, Asian, Mexican. Then you have, like, or are you Filipino, or multi-like whatever else the different ones are” (Cristina). These two examples highlight some of the ways that the participants’ counter narratives offer insight into another side of the story of racial and ethnic categorization. By telling their own stories and experiences using their own words, their counter narratives illustrate some of the many ways that the master narrative is inadequate in dealing with their lives. At the same time, these counter narratives also serve as cracks in the foundation of the master narrative that has regulated racial and ethnic categorization since this country’s inception.

While the previous chapters have been very useful in pointing out how the master narrative and counter narratives relate to racial and ethnic categorization systems, they have not addressed potential areas that can serve to disrupt the master narrative. This chapter changes that focus by concentrating on several themes that emerge in the counter narratives which provide insight into glitches or incidents where the master narrative proves to be inadequate. As a result, this chapter explores these themes since they represent cracks in the foundation of the current master narrative and provide the basis for future racial projects to occur. Some of the themes that
are addressed in this section include discussions on race and space, the other category, the use of the word Negro, and the overall idea that the boxes are not inclusive.

What Race? … What Space?

One of the first themes that emerges in the counter narratives where participants pointed out a potential crack in the foundation surrounds notions of race and space. In this theme, five participants pointed out that when checking off boxes on a form, checking the racial categories doesn’t account for how they were raised and how their cultural environment influences their racial identity. Latrice, a 32-year-old who self-identified as Black/Choctaw Indian, discusses this in relation to some of her family members. She states:

One of my cousins in particular, her mother is Mexican. Her father who is my uncle is the Indian/Black that we call it. Um, because she didn’t grow up in the Mexican environment even though her mother was that way and all of that side of the family, she didn’t consider herself Mexican. Looking at her you can’t tell, you know you look at her-she’s a Mexican. But um, and so, I wonder about, I haven’t heard specifically, but I wonder about does she really put her true ethnicity or does she have to choose like I have to choose about whether or not she would be considered Black. Um, but the same type of scenario where technically neither one of us are Black but because of the environment we grew up in, um… (Latrice)

In this example, Latrice discusses how the environment in which she and her cousin grew up influenced how they saw themselves in terms of racial and ethnic categories. This example highlights one of the confusing elements of the census for a lot of people; their category choices could simply reflect their racial/ethnic background or they could reflect how they were raised
and the cultural environment in which they grew to adulthood. Latrice goes on to provide an additional example when talking about another one of her cousins. She states:

Then, the third situation was pretty much along the same lines except that side of the family is actually all Indian. My grandfather was pure Indian and one of my aunts- one of my aunts- my cousin her father is from Holland. And so she’s White girl, you know looking at her. But she grew up in a Black neighborhood so when she opens her mouth and her, her personality or what have you is Black and so, if you ask her, she doesn’t consider herself to be White or Indian for the same reasons. So, in her case if she had a situation where she had to be asked, um, she would still say she was Black. (Latrice)

This idea of how a spatial or environmental area can influence one’s racial and ethnic identity choices on official forms is also discussed when Ramona talks about why she felt that the racial and ethnic category choices did not adequately represent the race and ethnicity of the U.S. population. She states:

Heavens no (laughs). They don’t take into account culture. And culture is a big part of who we are. In fact, it’s more definitive than our skin color. For example, I grew up in a rural area and so I don’t have the same experiences as someone who is Black who grew up in an urban area. Far from it. Actually, I have much more in common with other rural people than I do with urban people. (Ramona)

Tiffany also addresses the notion of race and space when she talks about one of the women who is in a mom’s group she belongs to. In her counter narrative, she discusses how they actually talked about this at one of their meetings. She discusses this further when she states:
My friend Lisa—she was born in South Korea but she grew up in Sweden and her husband (who is Korean as well) was adopted by a Swedish couple as a baby so he is Swedish. But everybody, whether it is in the U.S. or Sweden, wants to know where you are from and they say Sweden but they look Asian so no answer is good enough—you know until they get to the Korean part even though that is not their lived experience—that’s their heritage…So, it’s never good enough. So, now they are going through that with their three children and her question is what do we tell them to say— as if their identity is solely going to be constructed based on the ignorance of others. And that was kind of my comment to her. It’s like who here is trying to mold and shape their identity—are you just a participant in this? (Tiffany)

Joy also discusses this when she talks about the idea of box-checking and how that relates to some of her Asian friends who have been adopted by White families. In her counter narrative, she states:

I think it doesn’t show the portion of what you might see yourself as. So, I think that with a lot of transnational adoption, there’s a lot of adoption coming in from Asia but living with White families. So, I think that within your house it could be different than what you’re seen as color wise or maybe even blood wise. (Joy)

These comments demonstrate how spatial and environmental contexts can play a significant role in how people approach box-checking and also how it can impact their self-identity. This particular theme represents a possible crack in the foundation of the master narrative because the way that the master narrative is currently presented is in terms of genetic background or blood lines. As globalization occurs, and people find themselves in a variety of different contexts, these
excerpts indicate that it might influence how they think about racial and ethnic categorization as well. Furthermore, if people are living in different contexts that impact how they view themselves in terms of racial and ethnic categorization, this crack might expand into a future racial project that requires spatial/environmental influences to be included as well. If that transpires, it might slightly push people outside of the constraints of whiteness as it blurs the boundaries between what White and non-White really is.

Boxes Not Inclusive

One of the largest themes that emerge in the counter narratives representing a potential crack in the foundation surrounds the idea that the boxes which currently appear on the census forms are not inclusive. This theme highlights the fact that many of the participants in this study feel like their identities are not fully represented by the way that the racial and ethnic categories are presented on the forms. Since this emerges as one of the larger themes, this next section will discuss several mini-themes that appear in conjunction with it.

When Miguel, a 25-year-old who self-identified as Mexican/Chicano, discusses his experiences with racial and ethnic categorization systems, he states that he felt like the choices that were on the forms were limiting. He states that it makes him feel like “this is what you are because we don’t want to take our time to figure out what you really want to be” (Miguel). In this quotation, Miguel notes that the way in which the boxes are currently set up, they kind of force people to choose a category that is already there. As Nakashima (1992) points out, either a person fits into the categorization system or the system has to be changed to fit the person.

One of the most interesting aspects of the boxes not inclusive theme has to do with the fact that participants zero in on the word American by looking at the different ways that it is used
on the forms. As a result of this, participants define and talk about the role of the word American in a variety of different ways. For some participants, the lack of the word American in their categorization choices made them feel like they had to deny a part of who they were (i.e., the American part of their identity). For others, the word American made them feel like it overshadowed other elements and parts of their ethnic identity. Finally, some participants felt like including the word American into how they self-identified painted a cultural or national description of how they viewed themselves. Overall, participants usually discussed the boxes not inclusive theme in a way that indicates how the current categorization choices do not truly reflect how they see themselves. For example, Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as a Multiracial Ethnic American, states:

   Unfortunately, you know, we want people to be in these neat little boxes and we just aren’t. None of us are. Not even if you are so called White, or so called Black (laughs). So, I think, I think it mirrors our view. It limits our view of what people are and it changes our view of what they’re worth in terms of societal values.

Lisa, a 30-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian, also agrees with this point when she states “I think that there is so much more diversity than reflected in the existing categories. I guess from an aggregate perspective it may be reflective, but there is much more to the story.”

While these two excerpts show a general view of how the boxes not inclusive theme emerges in the counter narratives, several mini-themes also emerge which detail some of the specific ways in which the racial and ethnic choices on forms are inadequate for some people.
Asian Groups-No Hyphen American

One of the mini-themes that emerge in the counter narratives that fell within the boxes not inclusive theme surrounded Asian and Asian American category choices. Specifically, this theme had to do with the fact that Asian groups were not given hyphenated-American choices on the 1990 and 2000 census forms. In other words, people who self-identified as Asian could not express their American identity due to the fact that there were no options for people to be Asian-American. The categories listed on the forms just listed Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc. (see Appendix D). As Joy, a self-identified fifth-generation Japanese American points out, the boxes are not inclusive because there is no option for someone to be American as well as Asian. This can be identified when she states

Uh, I don’t know how they could make it more simpler but there’s something that’s confusing about it and also I think they should give Asians the opportunity to- like how they have Mexican American, I don’t know why they don’t have like Chinese American, Japanese American. We’ve been here so long like- like since the 1800s so I think we’ve very Americanized (Joy).

Joy goes on to point out that this is problematic for Japanese Americans because they use generation to describe their ethnicity and to discuss how long their ancestors have been in the United States. This can be identified when she states:

I say fifth-generation Japanese American and I think people might think that’s weird but it really is to signify again that my ancestors have been here since the 1800s- like you don’t need to explain to me certain things about being American or things that happen in the home because we live a very American life. Like I think our house looks like a regular White person’s house on the inside. And
every once in a while we’ll have like Japanese food like on New Year’s or some
of our mannerisms are Japanese like modesty and things like that- but yeah. (Joy)

Additionally, Joy points out that the impact of World War II also played a large role in how
Japanese Americans construct their identity. This can be identified when she states:

Generation is a huge identity part of Japanese American identity. WWII made a
big impact on how the Japanese saw themselves. Each generation seemed to
become more American in their ways- a survival tactic. I see myself as different
from a person born in Japan. (Joy)

Joan, who is bi-racial and self-identified as Asian American, also discusses this when she talks
about why she wrote in “Other Asian” on her census forms. She states that:

I think, like the way I read it- and maybe it’s not the way that it is intended- but
the way that I read the categories to be is that if I would have just checked Korean
um and that yes, I could mark more than one box, to me the American piece just
didn’t come in anywhere. And if I would have checked Korean or Chinese or
Japanese or whatever, to me that’s identifying me as um, as someone who is
originally from Korea- not someone who was born here Korean American. So, I
think there’s a lot of things that kinda – does putting Chinese mean that I’m from
China but now I’m a citizen. Does it mean that I have Chinese ancestry? You
know. So, I think there’s a lot of different ways to interpret, um, the categories.

(Joan)

Sumeet, a 31-year-old who self identified as Asian Indian, also points out some additional
problems embedded in the Asian category. He states that he thinks the categories are too broad
and he points out that:
I generally check the Asian American box but do view this as too broad or vague. South Asian is clearly different from east or Southeast Asian so there should be subcategories or at least completely separate categories. The south Asian category can also be inaccurate because there are East Asian ethnics (i.e., Nepalis) who are culturally South Asian. There are also South Asians who identify themselves as ethnically Black and culturally South Asian. I also think that there should be an optional fill in the blank category since my friends who are multiethnic come across problems in trying to limit themselves to one or the other box [i.e., the Other-Print Race category option]. (Sumeet)

Joan, who self-identified as Asian American, discusses this along with the idea of feeling American when she explains why she put Asian American on her 1990 census form. She states:

So, I used other because I don’t consider myself Asian only, but Asian American. But I wouldn’t consider myself to be – like I wouldn’t if I was given the option that they had there, I wouldn’t have chosen like Asian and White. Um, because I guess combining American for me comes closer to describing my father’s ethnicity than White. To me, White is a skin color, it’s not an ethnicity. So, um, that’s why I put that there. (Joan)

The underlying implications of many Asian Americans not being able to identify their American upbringing helps to perpetuate the common stereotype of Asians being foreign. Takaki (1993) addresses this stereotype in his book “A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America” when he recounts an experience with a White cab driver who remarks that his use of the English language is excellent. Takaki explains to the cab driver that he was born here and tells him “My grandfather came here from Japan in the 1880s. My family has been here, in America for over a
hundred years,” (p. 1). As a result, Takaki recounts that then “he glanced at me in the mirror. Somehow I did not look ‘American’ to him; my eyes and complexion looked foreign” (p. 1). Thus, in this example Takaki demonstrates how the use of the word “American” often stands in stark contrast with the notion of being a foreigner for many Asian Americans.

In the narratives, this shows up as several participants point out that on the census forms they would like to be able to indicate their American-ness as well as their racial/ethnic background. By allowing them to include their American identity, as in Joy’s case, it allows them to highlight the ways in which they are not the same as someone who just emigrated here from an Asian country. It also helps to dispel the current myth/stereotype of Asians as foreigners. Thus, the information that surfaced in this mini-theme from the counter narratives emerges as a crack in the foundation of the master narrative because it works against the stereotype of Asians as foreigners, and on a deeper level works against the historical notion that combines whiteness with citizenship. As a result, by not allowing people with Asian ancestry to also highlight their American-ness on census forms, these forms still perpetuate the association of American as White and Asian as foreign.

_Cultural and National Identity_

A second mini-theme that emerges under this section surrounds the use of the term American and its relationship to cultural and national identity. In the counter narratives, many participants express that they basically view themselves as American and want to stress the cultural and national aspects of their identity with their box checking choices. While this point has been briefly touched on in the discussion of how the Asian categories listed on census forms don’t allow for the option of being Korean American or Chinese American, this section is a little
different because it highlights several intersections between race, culture, nation, and ethnicity. It also provides brief demonstrations into how these things weave themselves together in the participants’ self-identifications.

One of the clearest ways in which this is demonstrated is when participants identify one way using racial and ethnic terms and then identify as American culturally or nationally. In some examples, this can be identified when participants state that they are Mexican American or African American. However, it is even more visible when some of the participants state that they are Mexican American, but they really just see themselves as American. In these examples, what is most interesting is how they are using the term American because it was is almost as if they feel like they must qualify their American-ness by explaining their racial or ethnic background.

In her essay, “Playing in the Dark,” Toni Morrison (1992) discusses the fact that in the construction of our national identity, American has been defined as White (p. 47). Furthermore, she goes on to discuss how we use hyphens to talk about African American or Mexican Americans, but when we think of the word American we are usually just associating it with cultural factors that are linked with White people in our society. An example of this can be identified when Eric and Christina describe their identities. When filling out the fill-in-the-blank question that asks participants “What is your race and/or ethnicity,” Eric states:

Um, I still say that my race or ethnicity is Mexican American or Chicano American. The explanation is, I guess just because me lately, um, that I am an American by nationality, birth, and allegiance. But, I’m of Mexican American/Chicano ethnicity or background.

Cristina, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American, also discusses this. Like some of the other participants, she notes that she would describe herself as “Mexican American
racially” but she sees herself as “just American” usually. Despite the fact that she views herself as “Just American,” she notes that this is in contradiction to how other people view her. She explains this when she states:

I always seem to just see myself as an American but most people don’t find that answer good enough. I then put myself in a group that helps explain what I am better. Usually that makes others feel better. But I see myself as an American.

(Cristina)

Cristina’s example is interesting because while she uses the term American to describe herself, she is met with resistance from others who want her to use more specific terminology to refer to herself. This tension that exists between her self-definition and the way that other people see her relates to Morrison’s (1992) discussion of how the word American is associated with Whites and the fact that a non-White person would need to qualify themselves by stating their racial/ethnic origin as well (i.e., hyphenating it- Native American, Mexican American, etc.). This also relates to the experience that Takaki (1993) had with his cab driver. Furthermore, this national/cultural way of using the word American can also be identified in Joy’s discussion of her identity. She states:

Um, I categorized myself as Japanese just because that’s what my heritage is even though nationally I’m American- so say if like Japan went to war with someplace, I probably wouldn’t feel any type of way because I have no connection really with Japan other than having visited there as a tourist. (Joy)

Ramona also discussed this when she was filling out the 2000 census question. She states “I defined as multiracial, and ethnically American” (Ramona). While the excerpts from the participants above indicate that they were very aware of how the national or cultural aspects of
American-ness play a role in their self-identification, it is not so clear for all of the study participants. Tiffany, who self-identified as Black/African American discusses how when she was living in Spain, she had to learn to become more aware of her national identity instead of just focusing on her racial identity. She states:

And so I lived in Spain for a year… and it took me a while I remember to first unlearn the stares. I mean, it’s Spain, so they just kind of stare - to unlearn that the stares didn’t really mean anything. I mean there were two Black people in town literally. And so, my first inclination was to believe that there was some kind of racist thing going on and it took me a while to kind of unlearn that and to realize that there was just a lot of curiosity- like what’s her story. Most people actually thought I was French until they started talking to me and then they were like, well clearly she’s not. Um, but, but, then the identity that most people that I was confronted with most often was not my racial identity but my national identity so that was the focus of either curiosity or hostility. But it was that I was an American citizen and not an African American citizen. (Tiffany)

While the earlier examples provide demonstrations of how some of the participants are aware of the American aspect of their identity, this example provides a perspective of someone who does not focus on it as much. Michael, a 40-year-old who self-identified as Latino/White, also provides a useful account of how the categories might be interpreted in his counter narrative. As he is discussing the differences between the 1990 and 2000 census forms, he talks about the wording that is used on the 1990 form and how it is not inclusive for certain groups. He states:

But what if you were filling out say for instance back at the 1990 census questions in reference to African Americans- for your race there was White- then there was
Black or Negro- there was no African American. What if you were a White
African American from South Africa? You got stuck filling out White because
that was the only option that you had. (Michael).

Michael’s observation is interesting because it highlights the intersections between national, ethnic, and racial identity. His counter narrative is useful because it demonstrates how nation-based identities might play a role in the way in which people check off boxes on forms. Taken together, however, these excerpts from the counter narratives demonstrate the complexity involved in box checking and show how identities are much more complex than the choices on the form sometimes allows for. Thus, like the Asian American-no hyphen theme, this mini-theme offers insight into another potential crack in the foundation of the master narrative; it shows how identities can be re-aligned to focus on other areas, instead of just racial and ethnic backgrounds. These examples indicate that for many of the participants, it is important for them to highlight the American part of their identity in their self-identification choices when choosing boxes on forms. Currently, the census focuses on racial and ethnic identity, and that has been included on each census form since its inception. This mini-theme shows how other identity-related questions (cultural, religious, or national identities) might be included on future forms in order to realign thinking outside of the traditional White/non-White binary that has persisted since our country’s inception.

Boxes Not Inclusive for Whites

While some participants felt that they were not able to detail the American part of their identity, several other participants point out that they were unable to express their individual ethnic ancestries through the 1990 and 2000 census questions. As a result, for them the boxes
were not inclusive; the boxes did not allow them to detail their American identity because the White category did not allow them to express their ethnic ancestry. While this theme did not come up in all of the counter narratives by participants who self-identified as White, this perspective offers an interesting insight into another possible crack in the foundation of the master narrative about racial and ethnic categories.

An example of this can be seen when Nancy, who self-identified as “EnIrDanGerman or White,” states that in her narrative she wrote about how the racial and ethnic questions/categories always make her feel inadequate. She points out that it was “like my background didn’t count because I was reduced to “White” (the same can be said of ‘Asian’ or ‘Black). Maybe that sounds silly, but I always wanted to be able to check off more boxes” (Nancy). As Nancy continues her narrative, she goes on to explain that she has always been bothered by the racial and ethnic questions that appear on standardized tests and job applications. She states:

The thing I don’t like about them- I guess I should say the first thing- is that they discount my heritage entirely. White is a color, not an ethnicity (the same could be said for Black as well). A lot of other cultures- Chinese, Japanese, Guamanian – are listed as opposed to Asian. It always made me feel like I was considered less important or less interesting of a person…. I'm White but that tells you nothing about me. You have no idea what specific races/ethnicities are included there - just White. (Nancy)

Lisa, a 30-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian, also agrees with this perspective when she points out in her counter narrative that ethnic diversity should also be included. She states:
Ethnic diversity, for instance, my ethnic diversity is blended into the category of White. So, my history and the culture that is associated becomes almost meaningless because they are melted into one category as White. (Lisa)

Joan, who is biracial, but self-identifies as Asian American, also addresses the idea of Whites not having a culture when she states:

I think with White people, the fact that, I think that a lot of White people think White is an ethnicity but it’s like there’s no culture to being White, well I guess there may be apple pie and that kind of stuff. But I think a lot of times White people don’t give themselves enough- enough credit. They don’t – they don’t culturize themselves enough. They don’t go back and like – like with my dad’s family- they don’t go back to the Scandinavian portion of their culture and they don’t go back to the German and Dutch portion, I think it just kind of got lost through the generations, so…

Baylor (2009) discusses this assimilation in his essay exploring the concept of whiteness and the role of ethnic identity. He points out that most scholars have acknowledged that “immigrants arrived as essentially in-between people, not quite White, and strove to be included in the White American majority” (p. 13). He continues by stating that “between World Wars I and II, or at the latest in the 1950s, these mainly southern and eastern European immigrant groups (also Germans, and earlier the Irish) basically saw their identity based on nationality fade, and as a result of tensions with African Americans, coalesced into a White identity group” (p. 13). Several scholars (Alba, 1990; Liberson and Waters, 1986; Waters, 1990) address the impact of assimilation on future generations of early European immigrants. For example, Liberson and Waters (1986) point out that, “there are a substantial number of people who recognize that they
are White, but lack any clear-cut identification with, and/or knowledge of, a specific European origin” (p. 264). Elizabeth, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian, addresses this in her counter narrative when discussing the first time that she had to think about her race. She states:

I honestly don’t remember. I grew up in a predominately White area so I didn’t have much exposure to other races so I don’t remember ever thinking about it as a young child. I don’t think that White people embrace or celebrate or talk about their culture as much as other races probably do. Sad though. (Elizabeth)

Lisa’s counter narrative offers a similar stream of thought when she states, “As someone who is Caucasian, I always felt that I didn’t have a unique ethnic background or culture, because I was just White or in Hawai‘i, a Haole.” Lisa goes on to point out that:

It seems to me that some people who belong to “minority” groups actually may be more aware and in touch with their unique cultural or ethnic backgrounds than many White people. In cities like Chicago, there is the German Fest, the Italian Village, and so forth. However, my experience has been that many White people are not very involved in their ethnic backgrounds, and I myself, had to intentionally seek out knowledge of my ethnic and cultural background.

Both Lisa and Elizabeth’s comments point to the assimilation in which many European groups took part in early on in American history. As these participants detail how the White box is not inclusive, several other participants discuss the impact that this has on their identity. For example, Samantha, a 29-year-old who self-identified as White/Caucasian, discusses the effect of not being able to define one’s ethnic ancestry and the idea of feeling “just American.” In her counter narrative, she states:
As a White woman, checking the “box” is always the same. White/Caucasian. In fact, checking the box is probably one of the few times I have to consciously think about my own race in my day to day life. I’ve always felt it was interesting that this category seems to encompass every kind of fair skinned nationality from Italian to Polish to Jew, which is a rather broad definition when you consider the variance of different cultures that live in the box. Personally, I have a mixed background that includes German and Russian, but as a 3rd generation of immigrants, those cultures have assimilated and I feel American, rather than part of any European heritage. (Samantha)

Lisa goes on to actually address the impact that being able to check off her ethnic ancestry on forms would have on her. She states that it would allow her to express what her ethnic heritage is “rather than just being a plain ole generic White person” (Lisa). She goes on to state that it would also:

Remind me of who I am and that I am actually pretty culturally diverse. Even though others may only see me as White….I think that people like me should be able to be multietnic, instead of just White. I want to share my heritage. And it is good for me (and my children) to be reminded of it as we go through life. (Lisa)

Furthermore, Lisa points out that:

If I knew how many Germans, Norwegians, and Yugoslavians were living in the U.S., I would feel more of a sense of identification with my heritage here. Plus, every time I checked those boxes, I would be reminding myself of my ancestry. I might want to explore it more if I started to see myself as distinct from other White people AND I want to know about the diversity of others, you know?
Elizabeth also talks about how being allowed to include her ethnic ancestry on forms would impact her. She states:

There are soooooo many mixes of ethnicity in our past that it would be too difficult to represent all of them. Besides - up until last year I thought I was Irish, ya know O’Callaghan - but my mom and dad informed me I was Scottish. I had no idea. And I think that is true for many people - they don't really know their history enough to accurately mark their ethnicity more specifically. (Elizabeth)

While the discussion by Samantha, Lisa, and Elizabeth offers various insights into how including ethnic identifiers within the White box would impact them, their discussion of this topic also sheds light on how the current set up restricts their identity choices. When most people think of racial and ethnic category choices, they don’t spend much time thinking about how the structure of those categories impacts self-identity choices and the categorization of others.

In light of this, the counter narratives by Lisa, Samantha, and Elizabeth really allow insight into how the structure has been set up in very specific ways to benefit power relations occurring in other elements of society. As a result, Omi and Winant’s (1994) racial formation comes into play, because part of its definition involves racial formation as a “process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized” (p. 55-56). Structuring a category as White instead of structuring it as Italian American, German American, Polish American, etc. helps to aid in the assimilation of Whites because it serves to strip them of their ethnic identifiers, merging them into one large category. This is undoubtedly aided by other social factors, such as movement into suburban areas (Katznelson, 2005) and the high rates of intermarriage among European ethnic groups (Waters, 1990).
In addition, the merging of the various ethnicities into a White category also works along with other racial projects such as situating the categories as White versus non-White. As one begins to put these things together, it becomes easy to see how they support the larger master narrative that rests on the binary structure of Whites versus non-Whites. The merging of ethnicities helps to assimilate White individuals so that they feel a part of one large majority, rather than allowing for potential cracks to emerge along ethnic lines.

An old proverb states that what the father wishes to forget, the child wishes to remember. This proverb emerges in the counter narratives as several participants discuss striving to learn about their ethnic ancestry. For example, Lisa addresses this when talking about how she intentionally had to seek out knowledge of her ethnic and cultural background. She states:

As the child of an immigrant from Germany and a Chicago-raised city girl, I always knew I was European, but what that meant was unclear. As I grew a bit older, I started asking questions about my relatives that were still living in Germany and my mom’s ancestors who had immigrated to the Midwest hundreds of years earlier. When I was 24, my mom and I went to Europe and toured Italy, Norway, Germany, and Denmark. Given that I am both Norwegian and German, I was very interested to learn about the local customs and loved hearing the different languages (although not understanding most of what people said for 1 and a half months in Europe was kind of uncomfortable). While we were in Norway and Germany, I felt a sense of belonging and understanding that I never knew before. I understood why I was the way that I was and why I acted the way I did. I felt strangely at home, despite the innate uncertainty involved with touring
several new countries. For the first time in my life, I actually felt proud to be part of these ethnic backgrounds, rather than just a White, Haole, American. (Lisa)

The desire to learn more about ethnic ancestry is also mentioned by Nancy, who made up a word when asked to describe her racial and ethnic background. She states:

As far as classifying myself, I made up a word: EnIrDanGerman (English, Irish, Danish, German)…but if I can’t make up words I would be White. The word I made up is more how I see myself – I’m interested in learning more about those cultures. And White means nothing, really – it’s just a skin tone. (Nancy)

While this is pointed out by several self-identified White participants, some of the non-White participants also point this out as well. Emily, a 53-year-old who self-identified as Black, notes this when she states that these categories are problematic “because everybody that is White is not White. They would probably like to have French, Italian, German, you know, maybe.” Cristina, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American, also points this out when she states that

Well, I understand why they do it the way they do. But it is kind of wrong that they will just classify White by itself, and then Black or Negro by itself and then they give everybody else like how an option of like Asian and then they list all the different kinds of types. And then I feel left out because I’m an “other.” But I feel sorry for the White people because you know they should be able to have heritage, too!

Cristina’s excerpt is directly related to the idea/perception that White people don’t have any cultural heritage, which may be supported by the fact that their ethnic ancestry is not highlighted categorically on forms. This seems to indicate that because White people are denied the
opportunity to list their ethnic background and are instead grouped into one category, they seemingly can lose a part of their heritage (at least in a symbolic form).

Overall, the excerpts discussed in this section provide an integral piece of the equation because they focus on the impact that the master narrative has on individuals generally deemed to be a part of the majority group. So, one has to ask – if these counter narratives demonstrate a desire from the White participants to be able to list their ethnic identifiers - whose interests are the master narrative really serving by lumping all White ethnicities together in one group? Furthermore, how might the structure of the White category contribute to the historical elements of whiteness that have appeared on census forms? In light of these questions - and many others - the theme that the boxes are not inclusive for the White category provides insight into this discussion; it represents a potential crack in the foundation – or an area where a future racial project might emerge that pushes away from the constraints of whiteness.

Boxes Not Inclusive for Latinos

Another element of the larger boxes not inclusive theme emerges in relation to the categorization of Latinos on the census. In several of the counter narratives, participants point out how problematic it is to list their racial and ethnic identities. These discussions primarily center on how race and ethnicity are listed on the forms and the use of the other race category. Other discussions center on the use of a mass Hispanic category versus breaking it down into several groups. In order to understand the framework from which these comments emerge, it is necessary to briefly look at the history surrounding the use of racial and ethnic categories for Latino/Hispanic populations in the past.
As discussed earlier, the U.S. census uses two separate terms, race and ethnicity, and when they are included on census forms, they serve as two separate concepts. As a result, the census asks a race question which includes Black, White, American Indian, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Other race. In addition, they also ask a Hispanic origin question. In light of this, for the purposes of the census, Hispanic is not viewed as a race; it is viewed as an ethnicity. As a result, when Hispanic/Latino people are filling out census forms, they are instructed to mark a race, and then answer the ethnicity Hispanic origin question.

Not surprisingly, this has led to a great deal of confusion since 1980, when Hispanic origin data was fully collected (i.e., this information was partially collected in 1970). In her book, “Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States,” Rodriguez (2000) sheds light on the reason why a large portion of the Hispanic population chose Other race for the 1980 and 1990 census (note: this also occurred in the 2000 census). For example, when talking about the 1990 census, Rodriguez (2000) states, “whereas less than 1 percent of the non-Hispanic population reported they were “other race,” more than 40 percent of Hispanics chose this category” (p. 7).

In addition to checking the other race box, many Latinos wrote in additional specific information to explain their choice. As Rodriguez (2000) points out, “the fact that these Latino referents were usually cultural or national-origin terms, such as Dominican, Honduran, or Boricua (i.e., Puerto Rican) underscores the fact that many Latinos viewed the question of race as a question of culture, national origin, and socialization rather than simply biological or genetic ancestry or color” (p. 7). Furthermore, Rodriguez points out that categorization on the census is also impacted by the fact that sometimes there are different views of race within different
countries, classes, and families; this is due to the fact that in Latin America, racial constructions have been more fluid, overlapping, and based on more variables.

The use of the Other Race category and the idea that the boxes are not inclusive for Latinos is discussed by several participants in the counter narratives. For example, Felix, a 31-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American, discusses why he chose the Other race category on the census. He states:

I didn’t believe there was one that really accurately described me, so I put in ‘Other Race,’ and then I filled in the word ‘Latino.’ And then in question 7, it says, ‘Is this person of Spanish/Hispanic origin?’ And it says fill in one for each person. And I circled the ‘Yes – Mexican / Mexican-American / Chicano’ one. My explanation was because I am Mexican-American, and I’m not considered Black, not considered White, not considered Asian, or Native-American, and I don’t feel that in the United States society, these classifications accurate describe Latino people, so that’s why I put in what I put in. (Felix)

Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as Multiracial Ethnic American, also discusses this in her counter narrative when she states:

Um, if you saw Latino versus every single country representation that could be there and realize the diversity within Latino and realize that Latino isn’t White, Latino isn’t Black, Latino isn’t in between with straight hair, um I think that that would…if people saw that on a regular basis they would have more appreciation for culture and what culture….how culture really affects us.

As Rodriguez (2000) points out, “Hispanics, as well as many other groups, challenge the U.S. system of racial classification because they do not fit neatly into the given categories. They are
neither a race nor a racially homogenous ethnic group,” (p. 174). Furthermore, Rodriguez continues, Hispanics are “a diverse array of multiracial ethnic groups, bound together by language, cultural ancestry, and discrimination in the United States” (p. 174). Michael, a 40-year-old who self-identified as Latino/White also discusses the diversity within the Latino population and talks about how the boxes are not inclusive for Latinos. In his counter narrative, he points out that there are only a few Latino identifiers listed, and then he moves on to discuss how the Other Latino-print group box helps to assist with this. He states:

When somebody’s Hispanic, it doesn’t mean that they are always from Mexico.

They could be from Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, or uh, Peru, or Spain. There’s a lot more countries and they kinda gave an answer that you could check off for Hispanic but then they broke it down so you can get real specific with your answer and more correct. (Michael)

While Michael discusses the fact that the census does allow Latinos to list other groups that are not listed on the forms, Miguel, a 25-year-old who self-identified as Mexican/Chicano, addresses his thoughts about how Latino usually appears as a mass category on most forms. In his counter narrative, he states “it’s usually just like Hispanic, like a big category. Like this is what you are because we don’t want to take our time to figure out what you really want to be” (Miguel).

Another perspective about how Latinos are categorized on official forms such as the census emerges from Eric, a 29-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American or Chicano American. When discussing this topic in his counter narrative, he points out that the current structure of using race and ethnicity is problematic because of how Black Latinos are classified. He states:
Um, oh the other thing that I’ve noticed- and I don’t notice it in Southern California but I haven’t even seen it but I can imagine it just from studying and going to places in the Caribbean with Joy that Black Latino, Afro. American Latino’s become Black. They’re no longer, uh, they’re no longer Latino or Hispanic, they’re categorized as African American. (Eric)

This discussion of Afro-Latino people directly relates to the concept of hypodescence, where multiracial people are often classified according to the category that has the least amount of social status in their society. This discussion becomes significant because it provides another example demonstrating how the current classification structure collides with the way in which many Latinos see and define themselves.

Overall, when taken together, these counter narratives are useful in this discussion because they point out yet another crack in the foundation of the master narrative. They demonstrate the master narrative’s inability to deal with a more fluid conception of race and ethnicity, and they provide insight into how things might change if enough people begin to view themselves in this way. While the examples in this section focus on Latinos, other research (Edmonston, Goldstein, and Tamayo Lott, 1996; Rodriguez, 2000) shows how having two separate questions about race and ethnicity relates to Arab Americans as well. When the 2000 census planning was taking place, along with the push for a separate Hispanic race category, there was also a push for an Arab American category. However, this effort lost momentum after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, due to fears about how the data might be misused.

While the set up for Latino identity is covered with two separate questions, the insight provided by these counter narratives demonstrate a couple of things: 1) how limiting the current master narrative structure is, and 2) how the emergence of a larger multiracial/multiethnic group
threatens the current structure’s reliance on whiteness and rigid racial and ethnic categorization. Thus, the necessity for Latinos (and to an extent Arab Americans and multiracial/multiethnic Americans) to push for categories that disrupt the current system emerges as a potential racial project which not only highlights the current cracks in the foundation, but also seeks to fundamentally change the system altogether.

Wording and the Use of Negro

While this last theme does not offer as much room to create a large crack in the foundation of the master narrative, it is important to discuss because it demonstrates additional areas where participants felt that they were not satisfied with the forms. One of the areas that emerged in the counter narratives surrounded the use of the word Negro when listing the Black category. In the counter narratives, several participants point out that they do not like seeing the word Negro listed alongside African American and Black. For example, Ashley, a 25-year-old who self-identified as Black/African American, points out that she feels more comfortable answering the 2000 census form because it includes African American along with Black and Negro. She states “because it has Black or African American and it has Negro on there but that’s how… like it’s politically correct to refer to Black people as African American and I was able to choose that and it just sounds better” (Ashley). She continues by pointing out that “it seems less um, like harsh or discriminatory because it says African American. Like Negro sounds like it is oppressive. It sounds bad” (Ashley).

Ashley was not the only participant to take issue with the use of the word Negro. Kathy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as African American/Native American, says that she felt a little tension when she was filling out the form because of the word. She states:
I’ve Got a Story to Tell

The word, just the words- you know Negro. I felt 1965 all over again, you know at the lunch counter getting beat in the head. I did. I mean first of all what is a Negro? You know. So if I…I’m like, you know and then Black – ok, that’s a color. I’m not, you can’t find me in a crayon box. I might be a little Sepia or something else but Black- no I’m not smut Black. [laughs] That’s sad….. In the 1990 census, I feel that it is limited and it feels like, feels like [laughs] a KKK member might of wrote it. (Kathy)

Latrice, a 32-year-old who self identified as Black/Choctaw Indian, also had a similar response. In her counter narrative, she states:

Yeah, the whole Negro thing again made me want to cringe because I’m like….what exactly is that [laughs] besides a color of Black or dark and I’m not. I don’t feel I identify with that so even though I use the term Black which is a color, it’s not as um…to me the word Negro is uh, is derogatory almost. So, it was almost like an insult to put that I was Black or Negro. (Latrice)

While Tiffany, a 38-year-old, points out that she did not like the use of the word either, she states, “but that’s something that might not have the same impact on someone who is much older, an elder…but it just seems so dated (laughs).” Tiffany’s point is well founded –when the term was still included on the 2010 census, it sparked a fury of commentary (Davis, 2010; Chivvis; 2010). However, the Census Bureau notes that “the wording of the race category labeled “Black, African Am., or Negro” is based on Office of Management and Budget standards and Census Bureau research that showed a segment of the population still identifies itself as Negro (United States Census, 2010). Thus, the Census Bureau still uses the term because there is still a segment of the Black/African American population that wrote in the term Negro on the
2000 census form and uses it to identify themselves. As a result, the Census Bureau has stated that they are in the process of testing the removal of the word from the question to see if it should be used in the 2020 census.

When all of these different themes are taken together, the counter narratives provide significant insight into potential areas where there are cracks in the foundation of the master narrative. While it is not likely that any one of these themes will in and of itself push our society outside of the constraints of whiteness, when taken together their possibilities for future racial projects offer a considerable opportunity. As Omi and Winant (1994) point out, racial projects are simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics (pp. 55-56). Furthermore, they are an effort to re-organize and re-distribute resources along particular racial lines. Thus, the discussion of race and space, how national identity gets incorporated into the current racial and ethnic categorization system, and the idea that the boxes are not inclusive (i.e., Asian-no hyphen, Whites-no ethnicity, and Latinos-ethnicity/not race) provide a significant opportunity for the master narrative to be reinterpreted, represented, and explained. Furthermore, these cracks in the foundation also demonstrate how racial dynamics could be reorganized to re-distribute resources in other ways.
CHAPTER VIII: PRESERVING AND DISMANTLING THE AUTHORITY OF WHITENESS

Reflecting...

Grad. School: “We can’t move forward...” It’s March 2010, and as I am writing up the final chapters of my dissertation, the Census Bureau launches its advertising campaign for the 2010 census. TV commercials, radio advertisements, and billboards everywhere seem to shout out the theme “We can’t move forward until you mail it back.” While hopeful, I carry the weight of history in my mind and I am left wondering where are we moving forward to? And who exactly is the “we”- who gets to move forward and who will get left behind?

Since the 2000 census decision to allow people to mark one or more racial or ethnic category (i.e., the MOOM option), many people feel like the census is making progress because it acknowledges people with multiracial/multiethnic ancestry (Citro, Cork, & Norwood, 2004). Furthermore, many people feel as if the census is finally allowing people to embrace multiple parts of their ancestry and heritage on official forms. For example, Samantha, a 29-year-old who self-identified as White/Caucasian, points out that even though she still gets to check one box, she thinks that “it is better for others who identify as multiracial. It gives a more comprehensive picture of the racial categories in the U.S. and allows people to self-define more so than be defined by the government.” Latrice, a 32-year-old who self-identified as Black/Choctaw, also addresses this in her counter narrative when she states:

I think that change [i.e., the MOOM option] reflects a knowledge and respect by policy makers and politicians that the diversity in the U.S. needs to be accounted for and documented. I think it gives biracial or multiracial people more legitimacy to be who they are, in terms of identity and census forms.
The excerpts by Latrice and Samantha point to a common view of the addition of the MOOM option to the 2000 census. However, even though on the surface, the 2000 census decision appears to be more inclusive, deep down there is something more complex and disturbing at play.

Despite the façade, the reliance on upholding notions of whiteness is still alive and well. In terms of the MOOM option, even though the census does allow people to check multiple boxes, what is often not broadcasted is the fact that these multiple categories are frequently re-classified back into the six official racial and ethnic categories instituted by Statistical Directive No. 15. Thus, when multiracial advocates pushed for the right to have more accurate choices to identify themselves, they received the MOOM option which looks good on the surface, but still upholds the old principles of hypodescence and the one-drop rule. As Williams (2006) points out:

multiracial advocates received something akin to symbolic recognition in 1997 since federal-level multiple-race data serve no statutory purpose and those identifying as multiracial on state forms … are recollapsed into OMB’s standard racial and ethnic categories whenever necessary for the purposes of federal reporting. (p. 117)

In other words, “where the MOOM option breaks down the binary race formulation, tabulation must put it back together” (Williams, 2006, p. 117). But why is tabulation so important? Tabulation is important because it relates to how racial and ethnic census categories are created and used, and because census data is ultimately used to inform all types of public policy decisions. As Omi and Winant (1994) point out:
How one is categorized is far from a merely academic or even personal matter. Such matters as access to employment, housing, or other publically or privately valued goods; social program design and the disbursement of local, state, and federal funds; or the organization of elections (among many other issues) are directly affected by racial classification and the recognition of ‘legitimate’ groups.

(p. 3)

In light of this, “the determination of racial categories is thus an intensely political process” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 3). The discussion of viewing the census merely as a means of self-identification versus discussing how it is used to inform public policy decisions is important to examine because it frames the discussion of the future impact of racial and ethnic census categorization. As a result, chapter 8 ends the analysis by talking about the complex relationship between self-identification, public policy, civil rights legislation, and whiteness. This chapter also revisits the discussion between whiteness and census history to imagine possibilities for change and the resistance that these possibilities would likely meet. Finally, chapter 8 ends with a discussion of what the end result might look like, limitations for this study, and why future research is needed to further our understanding of the impact of these categorical choices.

Self-Identification, Public Policy, and Civil Rights Legislation

One of the underlying themes that emerges in the counter narratives surrounds the distinction between how individuals view the census as a reflection of the American population (i.e., to reflect their self-identification choices) versus the use of the census as a tool to inform public policy decisions. While this debate emerges in the counter narratives in a surface level
manner, its roots are very deep and it relates to a critical underlying tension about the use of the
categories themselves. This tension surrounds the larger, complex relationship between self-
identification, public policy, civil rights legislation, and whiteness. Thus, this section begins by
discussing how issues of self-identification and public policy relate to the census.

One of the primary ways that self-identification and public policy relate to the census has
to do with the way that census data is currently used. Prewitt (2002) points out that in early
census history (i.e., the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries), flawed census science was
often used to justify racial hierarchies; however, “since the middle of the twentieth century,
census-measured race has had the goal of eliminating rather than justifying discriminatory social
practices” (Prewitt, 2002, p. 358). In other words, since the Civil Rights Movement, census data
has been used to enforce public civil rights legislation (Williams, 2006; Nobles, 2000).

Williams (2006) discusses this when she points out that during the Civil Rights
Movement, one of the fundamental ideas was that racism was not just a personal or individual
behavior. In light of this, civil rights advocates often focused on how racism manifests itself in
systemic ways. In order to document this systemic racism, civil rights advocates used statistics to
document residential segregation, unequal educational opportunities, infant mortality and life
expectancy, Black and White income differentials, and disparities in office holding (Williams,
2006). Thus, as Williams points out “not only did civil rights activists use statistics as the raw
materials for demonstrating the scope of institutional discrimination, but they also used the data
to generate political support for new laws and policies meant to address these documented
problems” (2006, p. 3). Overall, during the push for civil rights legislation, census data became a
useful tool to document the various examples of systemic racism in this country. Since that time,
census data and other statistics have been routinely used to uphold civil rights legislation. Thus,
as Williams (2006) points out, “the Civil Rights Movement turned the previously oppressive function of racial data on its head” (p. 3).

In the 1980s and 1990s, many civil rights advocates challenged the accuracy of the census due to undercounts in several geographical areas (Prewitt, 2002). Prewitt (2002) points out that in the mid-1990s, there were sharp differences about racial measurement but these differences faded during the actual census operations: “By the time Census 2000 was being fielded, community stakeholders and scientific organizations had focused attention on Census Bureau efforts to minimize the differential undercount, and on this issue there was general agreement” (p. 357). Challenges about the use of census data surfaced again when the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) launched an extensive review of the racial categorization system in 1993 and considered the addition of a multiracial category on the 2000 census (Daniels, 2003; Williams, 2006).

Many civil rights organizations (like the Urban League, National Council of La Raza, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) voiced their disapproval to the addition of a multiracial category because they felt that “the multiracial category would dilute other race categories and undermine the coherence of legislation and programs aimed at historically disadvantaged groups” (Nobles, 2000, p. 140). This very issue was actually mentioned in the counter narratives by one of the participants, Felix, a 31-year-old who self-identified as Mexican American. While his excerpt is a bit lengthy, it does a good job of highlighting the relationship between self-identification, public policy, and civil rights legislation. He states:

If you choose to say that I’m gonna select more than one box then maybe that’s gonna be taking government funded money from certain organizations that use
this information or that the government uses this information in order to allocate funding and money out to things. And maybe groups that had, in 1990, a whole bunch of Black people, and now that Black people group is getting a lot smaller because Black people are choosing to say, ‘well, I’m Black and this.’ I’m Asian and this, right…so, they get less money, so that’s not a good thing monetarily-wise to say for the group of people that may need it. It’s still the same group of people, but now that they’re checking the different boxes, they’re saying, ‘well, there’s not as many Black people anymore.’ Well, it’s just that we’re categorizing ourselves differently now. And so, we as a government are just going to give that group less money. So a lot of people might be conflicted by that and say, ‘well, I wanna have the freedom of being able to self-identify myself, but I know that there’s greater social implications of my decision on this box, other than just me saying, ‘yeah, I can say whatever I want to say.’” (Felix)

This excerpt by Felix points out how an individual’s self-identification choices could have greater social implications and adversely influence some public policy decisions. Due to this overall fear of losing funding, Pruitt (2002) states that many “civil rights groups and their spokespersons in Congress saw Census 2000 as the civil rights issue of the decade” (p. 358).

At the base of this disapproval was a fear that many of the people who previously identified as mono-racial would move towards switching to multiracial identification. Many of the civil rights organizations “felt that with smaller numbers and smaller percentages of the nation’s population, they would be weakened in their advocacy” (Nobles, 2000, p. 138). Ultimately, “via the MOOM [Mark One or More] decision of 1997, the OMB tried to steer a middle course on multiracial recognition” (Williams, 2006, p. 5). As Williams points out,
“officials in the Clinton administration’s OMB and Census Bureau seemed to see this as a symbolic gesture that would not adversely affect civil rights enforcement efforts” (2006, p. 5). It is important to note that multiracial organizations and advocates did not uniformly agree on how the multiracial agenda should appear on the census. Some, like AMEA (i.e., the Association of MultiEthnic Americans) felt that MOOM was a necessary compromise. Others, such as Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), and APFU (A Place for Us) felt that there should be a separate multiracial category which would not get reclassified back into the minority parent groups (Williams, 2006).

All in all, while the MOOM option appears to be a move toward more inclusivity and diversity on the surface, deep down it still upholds the old principles of hypodescence and the one-drop rule. Since the MOOM option re-classifies multiracial individuals into the minority parent groups, it was selected as a way to please both multiracial advocates and civil rights organizations (Williams, 2006). Thus, the multiracial agenda is unique because it can be used to promote a move towards more inclusivity/diversity, yet still function within the constructs of enforcing civil rights legislation. When one takes whiteness and census history into account, the problem lies with the fact that because it still upholds the civil rights agenda, it still adheres to the binary of White versus non-White and the overall elements of a master narrative infused with notions of whiteness.

In the counter narratives, Joan, a 39-year-old who self-identified as Asian American, talked about how multiracial people get re-classified according to the minority parent. This can be observed when she states:

And then my final thing was about how does the census use the multiple options and data because I think that all of these, even if you’re – even if you get to feel
good and choose all these different options you’re still going to be categorized according to one of these four or five groups and so um, so what are the- what are the real intentions? (Joan)

Joan continues with this train of thought when she ponders how the Census Bureau is going to actually use the data. She states:

Is anything going to be done or do we all just end up going back into four or five boxes, the original ones…They make you feel good but then they get convenient on their end with the reporting so the report’s not so long (Joan).

Joan’s excerpt is interesting because she points out one of the current dilemmas with the use of the MOOM option data. Many of the race-based policies were not formulated to use multiracial data, so the data has to be reclassified to make it fit into the racial and ethnic classification scheme that has the six original groups. Prewitt (2002) addresses this when he states that “none of the race-conscious laws or policies in the middle to late twentieth century were designed with 126 or sixty-three or even a dozen categories in mind” (p. 360). As a result, when the Census Bureau made a decision to report the full array of responses, government agencies responsible for administering race-sensitive laws had to do the best they could to align their tasks with the new reality (Prewitt, 2002, p. 360).

Ramona, a 39-year-old who self-identified as Multiracial Ethnic American, also discussed how the MOOM option data would be used when she talks about how it might impact affirmative action. She points out that it is:

A very touchy issue here in this country because by claiming all of your ethnic heritage it tends to dilute people’s view of the power of the inherited legacy of bigotry. And so, if we check all of the boxes then they will say then there’s no
need for affirmative action because you guys are all those. Well, no we’re not
really. And so, I think that it is important in terms of self worth and self
definition to be able to claim all of your ancestry without diminishing the legacy
that racism has on this country. Does that make sense? (Ramona)

These two examples by Joan and Ramona demonstrate some of the underlying thoughts
surrounding the relationship between self-identification and public policy. Ashley, a 25-year-old
who self-identified as African American, also discusses this in her counter narrative as she
questions why the census question on race and ethnicity is even necessary. In her narrative, she
states:

I never knew the purpose behind it besides for statistical purposes. But what
does the actual research serve as? What’s the purpose? Is it used to determine
how various races of people perceive the world around them based on their
attitudes or opinions or is it used for educational purposes to help solve or
understand why there may be an underrepresentation of a particular group in a
particular job market or school? (Ashley)

While Ashley doesn’t explicitly say that she is questioning the relationship between census data
as a reflection of self-identification choices versus public policy, Ashley’s narrative discusses
some of the underlying questions involved in it. Overall, these examples detail some of the
underlying issues at play in the relationship between self-identification, public policy, and civil
rights legislation. The next section takes this discussion one step further by discussing how this
relates to elements of whiteness, privilege, and colorblindness.
The Black/White Binary and Some Other Race

It is no secret that census data is used to enforce civil rights legislation. As Omi (2001) points out, Statistical Directive No. 15 “was initially issued to create compatible, non-duplicated, exchangeable racial and ethnic data by Federal agencies for three reporting purposes—statistical, administrative, and civil rights compliance” (p. 254). Thus, census data and civil rights legislation are inherently tied up in the binary structure of Whites versus non-Whites. The use of the current racial and ethnic classification system on the census forms upholds whiteness because the data is directly tied to the master narrative’s reliance on a Black/White (and White/non-White) binary. The way that people “think about, engage, and politically mobilize around racial issues have been fundamentally shaped by a prevailing ‘Black-White’ paradigm of race relations” (Omi, 2001, p. 250). Traditionally, historical accounts of other people of color have been cast in the shadows of the encounters between Blacks and Whites (Takaki, 1993; Omi, 2001).

However, demographically, a change is taking place: “Demographically, the nation is becoming less White and the dominant Black-White paradigm of race relations is challenged by the dramatic growth and increasing visibility of Hispanics and Asians” (Omi, 2001, p. 245). Furthermore, as Williams (2006) highlights, there are an increasing number of Americans outside of the multiracial debate who do not identify with the standard racial options that Statistical Directive No. 15 offers. For example, “close to seven million people marked ‘Other Race’ on the 1980 census. Almost ten million did so in 1990 [and] in 2000 … over fifteen million Americans – about one in twenty – selected the (renamed) designator ‘Some Other race’” (Williams, 2006, p. 118). To put this in perspective, fifteen million people “exceeds the total
Asian, American Indian and Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander populations combined” (Williams, 2006, p. 118).

Part of the tension felt by the Census Bureau has to do with groups advocating for representation on census forms so that they can address their public policy needs; thus, “the pressure to expand the number of racial categories is motivated in part by race-based social policy” (Prewitt, 2002, p. 356). However, as Prewitt points out, “the racial measurement system is now vastly more complicated and multidimensional than anything preceding it, and there is currently no prospect of returning to something simpler” (p. 360). Furthermore, “the number of categories is too few to accommodate identity politics but too many to fit with the law and legislation as currently designed” (Prewitt, 2002, p. 360). As a result, these identity politics and advocacy issues offer a unique opportunity to view the tension that currently surrounds how racial and ethnic data is used to inform public policy.

One of the ways that this tension is visible is through looking at the resistance/backlash which has emerged against how racial and ethnic data is used to inform public policy. The last 30 to 40 years provide ample opportunities to view how this backlash has occurred from all sides of the debate. What is most interesting is the way that this backlash and tension has occurred both within and outside of the traditional Black/White binary. For example, the traditional Black/White binary provides an example in how the Civil Rights Movement offered a forum for a variety of minority racial and ethnic groups to advocate for equal rights. This is an example of a White versus non-White structure. The White versus non-White structure can be more recently identified in examples of Whites who argue against affirmative action in terms of reverse discrimination (Gallagher, 2003b). Historically, several studies discuss minority versus non-minority tension in the midst of obtaining job opportunities and ethnic antagonism (Bonacich,
Recent examples such as how many civil rights advocates oppose the multiracial category (Williams, 2006; Nobles, 2000) demonstrate that more minority versus non-minority tensions may be in store.

Since census categories are inherently tied up in this tension, the use and construction of racial and ethnic categories on census forms serves as yet another social forum where people fight for their rights in order to obtain the privileges that might be bestowed on certain groups. Throughout history, many scholars (Takaki, 1993; Nobles, 2000; Williams, 2006) have described the various ways that the drive for social and political recognition has changed the American political landscape, and as Prewitt (2002) points out “census classification is central to the politics of recognition” (p. 357). In light of this, if history is the guide, likely there will be more groups pushing for recognition on census forms and more backlash and tension surrounding how this data is used to inform public policy decisions. Due to the emergence of this tension/backlash, the next section focuses on possibilities for change and discusses examples of racial projects that may push outside of the margins of whiteness.

Possibilities for Change

Sooner or later, something will have to give. Prewitt (2002) discusses this simple and obvious point when he states that “the situation is politically unstable…either statistical proportionality in race-based policy making will become much more multidimensional in ways hard to imagine, or the policies will confront a growing disconnection from the racial classification on which they have so long depended” (p. 360). The topic of how racial and ethnic categorization may change in the U.S. has been studied by a variety of scholars (Nobles, 2000; Rodriguez, 2000; Skerry, 2002; Daniel, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Embrick,
2006). In the midst of these discussions, several alternatives have been explored. Thus, this section focuses on some of the possible changes that may emerge.

**Color Blindness**

In the midst of the addition of the multiracial option (MOOM option) to the 2000 census, some multiracial activists and conservatives argued that the addition of a multiracial category would lead to the point where there would no longer be a need for racial and ethnic categories. While multiracial advocates and conservatives had different agendas, the argument behind this perspective involves the idea that a multiracial category would begin to blur racial distinctions to the point where racial classification would gradually disappear. As Charles Byrd, editor of the popular Interracial Voice website claims, “the group most able to help this society bridge the gap between the race obsessed present and an ideal future of racelessness is the mixed-race contingent” (as cited in Williams, 2006, p. 1).

The notion of a color blind ideology “is one in which social groups believe that racism and discrimination have been replaced with equal opportunity; that one’s qualifications, not one’s color or ethnicity, are the method by which upward mobility is achieved” (Ebert, 2004, p. 177). Thus, in relation to the use of race and ethnicity on census forms, a color blind ideology promotes the idea that there is no need to collect racial or ethnic data since opportunities are afforded to people according to their qualifications not their racial/ethnic background. Given that color blindness is often discussed in relation to the idea that there should be no racial/ethnic boxes at all, conservatives took advantage of the opportunity to push the multiracial agenda with the hopes of advancing their goal of undermining civil rights legislation and affirmative action policies (Skerry, 2002; Williams, 2006). For example, as Omi (2001) points out, in 1997, House
Speaker Newt Gingrich “used the issue of multiraciality to illustrate the indeterminacy of racial categories and to vigorously advocate for their abolition in government data collection, much as advocates of color-blindness do” (p. 248).

In her discussion of civil rights in multicultural America, Williams (2006) talks about how the movement to add a multiracial category created unanticipated relationships between multiracial advocates and those advocating for the conservative agenda (e.g., some Republicans and affirmative action opponents, most notably Ward Connerly). Based on this evidence, Williams points out that the multiracial idea can support competing agendas. Part of the discourse used to push the multiracial category was framed in the discussion of civil rights for people with multiracial/multiethnic ancestry. However, since many civil rights groups opposed the addition of the category, it offered a prime opportunity for right-wing groups to play on the notion of color blindness and push their hidden agenda of undermining civil right legislation. As Williams states, multiracial recognition was validated from both sides of the partisan divide in the 1990s because “Democrats wanted multiracial recognition without adverse civil rights consequences, while Republicans wanted multiracial recognition with adverse civil rights consequences” (p. 122).

This argument was further fueled by a growing amount of discontent and skepticism among the general public about how the census uses racial and ethnic data. As Skerry (2002) highlights, some conservative activists and Republican politicians argue that census questions about race and ethnicity are invasive and that citizens should not be obligated to answer them. Thus, Skerry (2002) points out, of course this was fine “with conservatives who have supported multiracialism as a means of undermining the entire post-civil-rights regime of affirmative action and group rights” (p. 337).
The fact that the multiracial agenda was picked up by those advocating a conservative agenda is of great interest because of how it was used to support the notion of colorblindness. Omi (2001) warns us that “racial discourse is now littered with confused and contradictory meanings. The notion of ‘color-blindness’ is now more likely to be advanced by political groups seeking to dismantle policies, such as affirmative action, initially designed to mitigate racial inequality” (p. 245). In light of this, Williams (2006) devotes a significant amount of time in her book to talk about how a left multiculturalism would be politically worthwhile.

Although the logic of a color blind ideology has been useful in advancing the agenda against affirmative action and civil rights legislation, many scholars (Omi & Winant, 1994; Omi, 2001; Skerry, 2002; Williams, 2006) have argued that it will not make race go away. As Omi and Winant (1994) point out, the United States has been concerned with the politics of race from its inception. Thus, while the multiracial agenda “disrupts our fixed notions about race and opens up new possibilities with respect to dialogue and engagement across the color line, it does not … mean that ‘race is over’” (Omi, 2001, p. 247). Skerry (2002) agrees and states that “the need for such data is not about to disappear…for better or worse, race is the only way we have of talking about social and economic disadvantage in the United States today (p. 337). It is, therefore, true that “precisely for this reason, racial and ethnic data will continue to be crucial, not only for the governmental and non governmental entities that implement race-based policies but also for those who would criticize or even condemn such policies” (Skerry, 2002, p. 337).

Thus, while racial counting is by definition an imprecise endeavor, “the alternative is continued racial disparity without even a paper trail” (Williams, 2006, p. 120). Because of this, it is necessary to continue to collect data and let the data itself determine if racial disparities diminish to the point where it is not necessary to collect it anymore (Williams, 2006). While the
colorblind ideology and the idea that there should be no racial/ethnic categories at all comes up in the discussion of how racial and ethnic categories are used on census forms, it is often used as a cover to merely reinforce the racial inequalities that already persist (Ebert, 2004). Thus, it is beneficial to look at other possibilities that might emerge in the discussion of how racial and ethnic categories are used.

**Honorary Whites and Collective Blacks**

Another (more likely) possibility that surrounds how race and ethnicity is categorized on census forms surrounds the move from a binary system to a ternary one. This possibility is addressed by a variety of scholars (Gans, 1999; Bonilla Silva, 2004; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006) who discuss the emergence of an intermediate system between the traditional Black/White hierarchy. As Gans (1999) states, “if current trends persist, today’s multiracial hierarchy could be replaced by what I think of as a dual or bimodal one consisting of ‘nonBlack’ and ‘Black’ population categories, with a third, ‘residual,’ category for the groups that do not, or do not yet, fit into the basic dualism” (p. 371). This move towards a ternary system is predicted for a variety of reasons, which include the changing demographics in the U.S., the increase in the use of colorblind ideologies in the attack on affirmative action, and the push for multiracial identification (Bonilla-Silva, 2004).

In his article detailing the emergence of a new racial stratification system in the United States, Bonilla-Silva (2004) argues that “race relations in the United States are slowly but surely becoming ‘tri-racial,’ much like they are in Latin America, South Africa, and other regions of the world” (p. 224). In Bonilla-Silva’s argument, this tri-racial system would include Whites at the
top, “an intermediary group of ‘honorary Whites’ similar to the colo
dreds in South Africa during
formal aparthei, and a non-White group or the ‘collective Black’ at the bottom” (p. 224).

While this structure may seem very similar to how non-White/non-Black groups (e.g.,
Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, etc.) are thought about in today’s society, there are several

Welcome to the world of tri-racial systems. In this type of system, Bonilla-Silva (2004) argues
that there will be “categorical porosity- fluidity in racial categories such that indi

cidual members of a

racial strata will more easily move up (or down) the stratification system (e.g., a light-skin

middle class Black person marrying a White woman and moving to the ‘honorary White’ strata)”
(p. 226). Other factors that add to the complex nature of this type of system include ordering
people according to a combination of their phenotype and cultural characteristics, intermarriage
rates, class and education levels, historical events, and occupational affiliations (Gans, 1999;
Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006).

Examples of groups that may fall into the White category include: traditional Whites, new
Whites, assimilated White Latinos, assimilated urban Native Americans, White appearing
multiracials, and a few people of Asian-descent. Honorary Whites would include light skinned
Latinos, Middle Eastern Americans, most multiracial people, and some Asians (Japanese
Americans, Korean Americans, Chinese Americans, and Asian Indians). Finally, the collective
Black would expand the traditional Black category and include Filipinos, Vietnamese, Hmong,
Laotians, dark-skinned Latinos, Blacks, new West Indian and African immigrants, and
reservation bound Native Americans (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006).

Bonilla-Silva (2004) points out several consequences of this type of system for the
United States. For example, he argues that it will change politics dramatically since the
emergence of honorary Whites will make racial cohesion difficult for some groups, and thus
buffer or derail much of the race-based conflict. Bonilla-Silva also argues that colorblindness will become more salient, and that if the government decides to stop collecting racial statistics then it will become harder to document racial disparities. Furthermore, he also argues that the new racial stratification system would be more effective in maintaining White supremacy. Finally, Bonilla-Silva contends that the Black identity will not dissipate since it will continue to serve as the opposite end of the spectrum. This means that colorism would play a larger role since the Black category would expand to include other dark-skinned groups. Given these predictions, it becomes important to look at other examples of tri-racial systems to see how they have panned out in other contexts.

_Brazil and South Africa_

As Bonilla-Silva (2004) points out, the emergence of a tri-racial system is nothing new from a global perspective. In his article, “Multiracial Identity in a Global Perspective,” Daniel (2003) discusses the main differences in how the United States, Brazil, and South Africa have categorized race and ethnicity. Daniel explores this topic from the perspective of a multiracial identity because it highlights some of the major differences in how race and ethnicity have been constructed. Many of these differences can be partially attributed to the demographics of early colonial communities, workforce needs, and the unique historical context of each location. Thus, as Daniel (2003) points out:

Irrespective of the national and cultural origins of the colonizing Europeans, miscegenation and the social differentiation of multiracial individuals from other non-Whites were motivated primarily by self interest and were closely
related to respectively the ratio of European men to women and the ratio of Whites to non-Whites. (p. 249)

Additionally, in contexts where Whites were greatly outnumbered, multiracial people “not only occupied an intermediate position in the racial hierarchy but also collaborated with Whites in preserving the racial status quo” (Daniel, 2003, p. 249).

While the United States has historically maintained a binary racial order, there has been no consistent recognition of an intermediate identity or status for multiracial people (Daniel, 2003). This is largely because the United States relies on a variety of legal and social structures to enforce the rule of hypodescence (i.e., the one drop rule) and render multiracial people non-White. Furthermore, in the United States, there were legal barriers to interracial marriages and formidable social prejudice against these relationships that continued long afterward (Daniel, 2003).

Brazil, however, has had a long history of combining racial, economic, and cultural attributes which has led to more fluid racial/cultural markers and a racial order that acknowledges multiracial individuals (pardos) along with Whites (broncos) and Blacks (pretos) (Daniel, 2003). In this system, Black and White are the relative extremes on a continuum, but race and status are generally determined by physical appearance in conjunction with socioeconomic and cultural factors as opposed to focusing on ancestry alone (Daniel, 2000). Multiracial individuals occupied an intermediate position in the social structure, superior to Blacks and Native Americans, but still significantly inferior to that of Whites. Through granting multiracial individuals this social location, European Brazilians “won their loyalty in efforts to exclude Blacks and Native Americans from power without simultaneously undermining White domination and control,” (Daniel, 2003, p. 257). Furthermore, multiracial individuals were often
rewarded in proportion to their cultural and phenotypical approximation to the European ideal, which also reaffirmed the White hierarchy (Daniel, 2003).

Another unique feature of the Brazilian system surrounds the notion of whitening and the idea that race-mixing would lead to whiter Brazilians and a new Brazilian race. Since most Whites could not be sure that they did not have African ancestry, the notion of whitening along with the practice of marrying lighter/more European appearing spouses became a cure against miscegenation (Daniel, 2003). Thus, as Nobles (2000) points out, “Brazil’s intelligentsia, political elite, and census officials have emphasized racial ‘mixture’ with the same vigilance that their U.S. counterparts have emphasized racial ‘purity’” (p. 87). In light of this argument, colorblindness plays an integral role in downplaying race, since it is presumed that racial differences are not an important way to distinguish Brazilians because the majority of them are racially mixed.

However, since the late 1970s, this argument has been challenged and many African Brazilian activists have sought to document the racial disparities. Unfortunately, given the lack of legal discrimination and ambiguity of racial identities, it has been harder to achieve racial cohesion to mobilize people politically. Ironically, as Daniel (2003) points out, “correspondingly, many activists believe that the United States one-drop rule of hypodescent should be adopted in Brazil as a form of ‘strategic racial essentialism’” that would make it possible to mobilize African Brazilians by the masses (p. 266).

While there are some similarities between the South African system and the Brazilian system, there are notable differences as well. For instance, like in Brazil, the original colonists in South Africa were outnumbered (and mostly single men) so many of them formed sexual liaisons and marriages with non-White women (Daniel, 2003). As a result, during that time there was
a significant absence of legal prohibitions against miscegenation. By the time that the social
division between Whites and indigenous Blacks was established, Europeans had to figure out
what to do with the multiracial individuals (i.e., coloreds). The categorization system that
resulted was somewhere in between what occurred in Brazil and in the United States.

In this social system, Daniel (2003) argues that multiracial people “were allowed to find
their own social location in a social order that was racially prejudiced and discriminatory but not
legally segregated” (p. 270). The multiracial population eventually formed a group that was
intermediate to Whites and Blacks and was maintained largely through social convention instead
of through legal policies as in the United States. As a result of this, along with social interaction
and miscegenation between poor Afrikaners and colores, passing became common until the
mid-80s when miscegenation laws were created (Daniel, 2003). As in Brazil, the early instances
of passing resulted in many Whites who either knew or strongly suspected that they had non-
White ancestors. This, however, is very different from the United States where racial purity has
been a goal enforced through hypodescent and social discourse which concealed any suspected
non-White ancestors.

All in all, under apartheid, the multiracial population was granted an intermediate status
where they were given more privileges than Blacks, but far less privileges than Europeans.
According to Daniel (2003) while the multiracial population in Brazil was for the most part loyal
to European interests, the situation has not been the same in South Africa. Due to the fact that
many people in the working-class multiracial population had to compete with Blacks for
commodities such as jobs and housing, their loyalties fluctuated between the Afrikaner-led
National Party and the Black-led African National Congress. In light of this, both parties
advocated for their vote.
Although multiracial people have been acknowledged in both the Brazilian and South African systems, this has not protected them from the discrimination from the White elite. Daniel (2003) points out that although multiracial people have occupied a more intermediate status in Brazil and South Africa, “overall their location has been much closer to subordinate Blacks than dominant Whites” (p. 248). Thus, in these systems, a prevailing White hierarchy remained at play and the primary racial divide in terms of the distribution of wealth, power, privilege, and prestige is between Whites and non-Whites and then between the Black and multiracial populations (Daniel, 2003).

Overall, the discussion of the tri-racial systems in Brazil and South Africa demonstrate how racial and ethnic categorization can be implemented in vastly different ways in different contexts. This discussion also highlights the fact that the emergence of a tri-racial (i.e., ternary) system in the United States would involve a variety of racial projects which would ultimately culminate in a new racial formation (Omi & Winant, 1994). Since racial projects involve an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, there are a variety of different factors that can play a role in how the U.S. racial and ethnic categorization system may pan out. Furthermore, since racial projects also involve an effort to re-organize and re-distribute resources along particular lines, it is important to think about how this might affect the current use of census data to enforce civil rights legislation. Thus, the following section will discuss some of the factors that need to be considered in the future categorization of race and ethnicity.

**White minority or White majority?**

There are several major factors that surface in the discussion of racial and ethnic categorization on census forms. One of the issues surrounds the projection that sometime within
this century Whites will no longer be the numerical majority. On the surface, it appears that this is simply the result of the growing diversity of America. However, when one takes a deeper look, it becomes evident that historically Whites became and maintained a numerical majority through a variety of laws and social policies that discriminated against non-Whites. For example, prior to the 1965 Immigration Act, the government used a national origin quota system to determine who would be able to immigrate to this country. This quota system privileged immigrants from European countries over other parts of the world and immigrants from Asia were largely barred or severely restricted (Takaki, 1993).

As Twine and Warren (1997) point out, according to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service’s 1992 yearbook, “between 1820 and 1951, 84% of the immigrants to the United States were from Europe, whereas by the 1980s, 85% were from Asia and the Americas (excluding Canada)” (p. 201). Furthermore, Takaki (1993) points out that “by 2056, most Americans will trace their descent to ‘Africa, Asia, the Hispanic world, the Pacific Islands, Arabia – almost anywhere but White Europe’” (p. 2).

In light of this, the 1965 Immigration Act, along with other laws like the 1790 Naturalization Law, and the rampant discrimination practices against non-Whites, helped to establish Whites as a numerical majority in this country. The 1965 Act meant that for the first time in U.S. history, immigration policy no longer privileged European immigrants, and subsequently, immigration from Asia and Latin America has far outpaced European immigration (Twine and Warren, 1997). Twine and Warren (1997) point out that “this radical reconfiguration of the immigrant population has prompted many to predict, some with extreme trepidation, others with great anticipation, that Whites will become a numerical minority in the next century” (p. 201).
But will Whites really become the minority or will the boundaries of the White category expand once again and combine with legislation against non-European immigration to keep Whites in the position of the numerical majority? As Twine and Warren (1997) point out, the argument that Whites will become a numerical minority due to increased immigration from Asia and Latin America “hinges on an unexamined premise- the essentialist premise that whiteness is a fixed category” (p. 201). In other words, “one can only draw the conclusion that Whites are becoming a minority if one assumes that racial categories are static across time and place” (Twine and Warren, 1997, p. 201). As Daniel (2003) warns, expanding the White category “would not only bolster the numbers of individuals with insider status but also maintain the United States as an ostensibly White nation” (p. 279).

If history has shown anything, it is that this is a plausible argument worth looking into. Several scholars (Ignatiev, 1995; Roediger, 1991, 2005; Jacobson, 1998; Guglielmo, 2003; Brodkin, 1998; Goldstein, 2006) document how historically, the boundaries of the White category expanded to include a variety of groups (e.g., the Irish, Italians, Jews, etc.) who were initially thought of as being non-White. For example, in the early history of the United States, the Irish were generally seen as a separate, inferior race from the superior Anglo Saxon race (Ignatiev, 1995). However, when one fast-forwards to today’s society, not many people would seriously suggest that former President Ronald Reagan, Mayor Richard Daly, or Senator Edward Kennedy, all men of Irish descent, are not White (Twine and Warren, 1997, p. 2002). Thus, throughout history, the boundaries of the White category have expanded (e.g., Irish, Italians, Jews, etc.) and shrank (e.g., Mexicans in the 1930 census) to accommodate the goals of the master narrative.
In light of this, Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) discussion of new honorary Whites and Twine and Warren’s (1997) assertion that this is a serious argument to consider should be further explored. The groups mentioned above were able to conform to the requirements of whiteness by adhering culturally and distancing themselves from Blacks and elements of blackness. As a result, they also changed the way that people think about who gets classified as White in this country. In light of this, future racial projects (Omi and Winant, 1994) might emerge to accommodate more people (e.g., White-appearing multiracial people and/or Latinos) into the ranks of whiteness and/or to prevent those who are currently counted as White (e.g., Middle Easterners) from leaving the ranks of whiteness. Thus, as Twine and Warren (1997) point out, “given this dynamism…one cannot safely assume that Whites will become a numerical minority simply because the current immigrant population consists largely of people who are today defined as non-White” (p. 215).

Whiteness Deconstructed

In the discussion of color blindness and the move towards a tri-level system, one of the underlying assumptions is that whiteness will always be a central part of the equation. While I do not believe that whiteness will be eliminated any time soon, I am critical of the tendency to not address or challenge its power in relation to how racial and ethnic categories are discussed and constructed. As Nakayama and Krizek (1995) remind us, “in U.S. culture, whiteness has assumed the position of an uninterrogated space” (p. 293). By not challenging whiteness, we are participating in allowing its reign to continue without any opposition. Thus, this study seeks to interrogate the intersections of whiteness and the use of racial and ethnic categories on census forms. In order to do that, this section will revisit one of the major themes that emerge in the
counter narratives to show how it represents a crack in the foundation of the master narrative, and to show how it pushes our society outside of the center of whiteness. While there are several other themes that emerge in the narratives, this section will focus on the boxes not inclusive theme as an example (see chapter 7 for more information).

Boxes Not Inclusive

The boxes not inclusive section includes several mini-themes all surrounding the idea that many of the participants feel as if their identities are not fully represented by the way that racial and ethnic categories are presented on the forms. This theme is chosen as an example because it offers insight into several areas where future racial projects may emerge which function outside of the constraints of the current master narrative. For many of these sections, their implementation would require thinking about racial and ethnic categorization in vastly different ways. Others represent a small change that moves in the right direction. However, even though these themes hold the possibilities to work against whiteness, this section will also briefly discuss how they could be used to re-instate whiteness in a new way. Thus, this section focuses on Asians-no hyphen, ethnicity for Whites, multiracial identity, and boxes not inclusive for Latinos.

Asians-No Hyphen

Throughout history, the boundaries of the White category have been carefully guarded and simultaneously bound up with the notion of American-ness (Haney Lopez, 1996, Morrison, 1992). In the midst of this, the hyphenated version of American-ness (e.g., Native American, African American) became a way to refer to non-White people who were Americans. As Martin et. al (1996) point out, “American” becomes an explicit reference to European heritage and thus
doesn’t require the use of Euro-American or European American. In light of this, given the common stereotype that Asians (even Asian Americans) are foreign, the absence of a hyphenated American identifier on census forms is significant. While the implementation of a hyphenated identity on census forms for Asian Americans would not be a drastic change, it would be a step in the direction of challenging whiteness. This would represent a smaller scale racial project (Omi & Winant, 1994) that would chip away at one of the ways in which whiteness manifests itself on census forms. Furthermore, by challenging whiteness in this setting, it allows for a challenge of the many the stereotypes and perceptions that are wrapped up in these categories.

Boxes Not Inclusive for Whites

Another theme that emerges in the boxes not inclusive section surrounds the idea that the racial and ethnic boxes are not inclusive for Whites. The idea behind this theme is based on the fact that the White category doesn’t give White people the option to identify the ethnic parts of their ancestry. This theme is particularly interesting because it would directly contradict the historical move to assimilate European immigrants into a unified White category. Furthermore, the integration of this theme into the census categories would be interesting since, as Liberson and Waters (1986) point out, “there are a substantial number of people who recognize that they are White, but lack any clear-cut identification with, and/or knowledge of, a specific European origin” (p. 264).

If implemented, this racial project could serve as a way to dismantle the embedded nature of whiteness in census categories due to the fact that it would lead White people to identify themselves along more ethnic lines, and it could have a significant impact on whether or not Whites see themselves as one large group. However, several scholars (Alba, 1990; Waters, 1990)
point out the high amounts of interethnic marriages among Whites, so it is likely that many Whites would just move to seeing themselves as multiethnic versus viewing themselves as distinct groups (e.g., Italian American versus Irish American). So, all in all, while a move to allow ethnic categories on census forms for Whites may move people slightly outside of the center of whiteness, most likely this would not have a large impact on our society due to the fact that those categories may take the role of a symbolic ethnicity (Alba, 1990; Waters, 1990). In light of this, given the recent dialogue about the integration of a multiracial category and the placement of Latino as an ethnicity, the largest racial projects currently seem to center around multiracial and Latino identity.

**Multiracial Identity**

The impact of multiracial identity offers another opportunity to serve as a racial project affecting the embedded nature of whiteness in census categories. For example, Gans (2004) notes that, “About half of all Asian-Americans and light skinned Hispanics now marry Whites, and at that rate, they may be defined as near White in a few decades,” (p. 44). Furthermore, a study by Alba and Nee (2003) points out that since 1997, about 20 percent of all Asians in the United States had non-Asian partners and these unions “produced about 750,000 mixed-race children under eighteen years of age” (p. 94). As Gallagher (2006) points out, if the boundaries of the White category are expanded to include the children from some interracial pairings (e.g., White/Asian, White/Latino, White/Native American), but not the pairings between Blacks and non-Whites, then the one drop rule and the notion of hypodescent will be challenged. Thus, while Black/White interracial relationships are still largely stigmatized in our society, Gallagher
(2003a) argues that there seems to be a growing acceptance of White/non-Black couples and the assimilation of their mixed-race children.

In light of this, along with the 2000 census MOOM option, there might be a division between how White and non-White appearing multiracial individuals are treated. Thus, Gallagher (2006) states that “perhaps, it may be more accurate to conceptualize this process as a ‘which drop rule’ in which certain racial parings will be privileged, whereas others will be relegated to the bottom of the racial pecking order” (p. 112). If this option occurs, it would uphold notions of whiteness, much in the same way that it did in Brazil and South Africa. However, as Daniel (2003) points out, it is difficult to make that comparison since “the new multiracial identity in the United States seeks to expand definitions of blackness, as well as whiteness, to include more multidimensional configurations” (p. 277). Daniel (2003) points out that as a racial project, this new multiracial identity does not really re-articulate what happened with the Brazilian and South African models of multiracial identification because it is not synonymous with “the desire to embrace a White racial identity and, more specifically, to gain the privileges associated with whiteness” (p. 280).

Williams (2006) also addresses this when she points out that “the American understanding of ‘multiracial’ is being shaped right now, in extraordinary and unparalleled ways” (p. 129). Right now, it is unclear how this racial project involving multiracial identity will pan out; however, what is clear is that the very inclusion of a discussion about multicultural identity helps “deconstruct the very means by which racist ideology and racial privilege are enforced in the United States, specifically the notion of racial ‘purity’ as well as mutually exclusive racial categories” (Daniel, 2003, p. 277). Thus, the multicultural racial project directly challenges the ways that whiteness has manifested itself in the use of racial and ethnic categories
on census forms and it serves as an opportunity to see a different interpretation, representation, and explanation of racial dynamics. Like multiracial identity, the Latino category represents another possibility that can challenge the embedded nature of whiteness.

Boxes Not Inclusive for Latinos

On the 2000 census, over 15 million Americans marked Some Other Race and 95 percent of them were Latinos (Williams, 2006). The way that Latinos are categorized on census forms is of great interest in the discussion of racial and ethnic categories and the embedded nature of whiteness because they do not neatly fit into the current categorization scheme. Rodriguez (2000) points out that:

Hispanics, as well as many other groups, challenge the U.S. system of racial classification because they do not fit neatly into the given categories. They are neither a race nor a racially homogenous ethnic group. Rather, they are a diverse array of multiracial ethnic groups, bound together by language, cultural ancestry, and discrimination in the United States. (p. 175)

Since the very beginning of the Hispanic Origin question, “The Hispanic category… was a conceptual departure from the rest of the American classification system,” (Williams, 2006, p. 119). Williams (2006) points out that, “As the Latino population has grown, this arrangement has become increasingly unwieldy, at least for those who do the counting” (p. 119). Part of the reason why there is so much discussion about the manner in which Latinos are represented on census forms surrounds the fact that currently the census asks two separate questions about Latino identity- one about ethnicity and one about race.
Since the introduction of the Hispanic Origin question to the 1970 census and the implementation of Statistical Directive No. 15, the Census Bureau has used five racial categories (American Indian, or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Black, White) and two ethnic designations (Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino). Thus, Latino is primarily treated as an ethnicity; this means that people who identify as Latino are required to answer one question that focuses on their ethnicity (e.g., the Hispanic Origin question) and one question that focuses on their race. The problem with this set arrangement is that many Latinos do not see their identity reflected in the five racial categories that are available to them and this has led to a large portion of the population checking off the Some Other Race box. As a result, Williams (2006) points out that the Some Other Race category “tells us more about how people do not identify racially than how they do” (p. 119).

There are several other variables at play in the discussion of how Latinos will be categorized on the census. In her book, “Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States,” Rodriguez (2000) spends a great deal of time examining the impact of this categorization. She points out that although many groups have had similar histories and presented similar challenges to the Census Bureau, the Latino category has made questions of racial classification more salient because of “the increase in the two I’s, immigration and intermarriage” (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 27). Other variables include the extent to which a Latino category would correspond with a minority status. For example, Williams (2006) notes that this discussion becomes more complicated when one considers the fact that “the content of Latino racial identity has everything to do with the extent to which Latinos identify as minorities, the future of Black-brown coalitions, and other interesting topics” (p. 119).
Like the multiracial category, the Latino category is emerging as a new racial project that could significantly impact considerations of racial and ethnic categories. Furthermore, since it is a category that spans a variety of different phenotypical characteristics, it challenges the embedded nature of whiteness in the current racial and ethnic categorization system and it moves us outside of the traditional Black/White hierarchy that the master narrative currently propels. As Williams (2006) points out, “MOOM was sold as a symbolic response to a different demographic trend. Under the circumstances, however, one wonders whether perhaps it is not multiracials but Latinos who are leading the way in the binary breakdown” (p. 119).

All in all, the fact that there are a growing number of Americans who don’t view themselves in the way that the current categories are presented means that an already troubled Census Bureau will face more dilemmas in the future. Thus, the uncertainties that the Census Bureau currently face go far beyond a technical discussion; they are fundamentally tied to the enforcement of civil rights legislation and core conversations about how Americans view themselves. As Williams (2006) points out, “a society long hostile to acknowledging racial mixture will somehow have to come to terms with a growing population of self-identified multiracial individuals and others who are difficult to place conceptually and ascriptively in the old familiar race hierarchy” (p. 120). Thus, society is in the midst of the development of two major racial projects surrounding multiracial and Latino identity and depending on how these turn out we may see a fundamental change in the old familiar race hierarchy (i.e., the master narrative).
Considerations for the Future

As society approaches this new crossroads in terms of racial and ethnic categorization, people need to “be alert to any half-hearted attack on White racial privilege that merely attenuates the dichotomization of blackness and whiteness while leaving intact the hierarchical relationship between these categories of experience” (Daniel, 2003, p. 279). Initially, “OMB’s review of Statistical Directive No. 15 was prompted by concern that the existing categories were incapable of capturing America’s growing diversity and increases in interracial marriage” (Nobles, 2000, p. 168-169). Perhaps, in the near future, there will be more changes to Statistical Directive No. 15 and the way that racial and ethnic data is collected on census forms. In his article, “Race in the 2000 Census: A Turning Point,” former Census Bureau director Kenneth Prewitt describes four trends that he foresees in the intermediate future. These include the pressure to expand the number of racial categories; growing scientific doubts about the reliability of racial measurement; increasing public discomfort with racial classification; and greater difficulties reconciling how race is measured with how the resulting classification is used in lawmaking public policy (Prewitt, 2002, p. 355).

It is important to take a look at these trends because they offer insight into how changes may be made in racial and ethnic categorization. For example, Prewitt’s (2002) discussion of the pressure to expand the number of racial categories is indicative of the way that census data is tied up with enforcing civil rights legislation. As a result, it is likely that groups will continue to advocate for representation on census forms because of the reality that it does impact and inform public policy decisions. Secondly, Prewitt’s (2002) discussion of the growing scientific doubts about the reliability of racial measurement is important to consider – especially in the midst of groups that challenge the current racial and ethnic classification system. As Prewitt points out,
this puts the Census Bureau in a precarious position of battling serious problems of reliability and validity in racial measurement versus responding to the various stakeholders’ needs. Since race is less grounded in science than other categories like age or gender, “classifications that have scientific grounding are not radically altered by prevailing political currents,” (p. 357).

Thirdly, the attention that Prewitt (2002) gives to an increasing public discomfort with racial measurement is real. Given that the Census Bureau has moved towards using fewer questions (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, gender, number of people in the housing unit) on the short form, the race questions loom larger than ever. As Prewitt (2002) notes, “if you simply inspected the short form it would not be unreasonable to conclude that the purpose of the census was to collect racial information” (p. 359). Considering that this prominence is occurring at a time when race-based social policies are under attack, it becomes clear why more groups have advocated for better data collection methods from the Census Bureau. Many people are fed up with categories that simply do not represent the way that they personally view their identities. Nobles (2000) addresses this when she states that “Although in many ways past racial categorization seems stable and serves as common sense, there are clear signs that Americans have begun to view race differently and want census categories to reflect these new perceptions” (p. 169).

Additionally, an increasing public discomfort with racial measurement can also be tied to the amount of skepticism that people generally have about the data that the census collects. This skepticism also surfaced in several of the counter narratives by participants in this study. For example, Lisa, a 30-year-old who self-identified as Caucasian, states that she has concerns about how racial and ethnic data is used on census forms. She explains:

But I wonder if it can be used to determine which areas of the city, neighborhoods, and such will have freeways built, nuclear plants developed, you
know? …so, the poor non-English speaking people won’t stop the nuclear plant from being built, you know. (Lisa)

Nancy, a 30-year-old who self-identified as “EnIrDanGerman” or White, also expresses concern about how the government uses census data. She states, “I wonder why the government needs that information? Why do they need to know? I generally don’t trust the government so I always wonder where the information is going and how they are using it in devious ways” (Nancy). But Lisa and Nancy’s concerns are not unfounded. Early census data was used to try to prove the inferiority of Blacks, multiracial people, and some European immigrants as well. Nobles (2000) points out that “the addition of such categories as ‘deaf’ and ‘blind’ to the 1830 census schedule, and of ‘illiteracy,’ ‘insanity,’ and ‘feeblemindedness’ to the 1840 census reflected the influence of the new statistical thinking” (p. 32). More recently, “sensitivity about government use, or misuse, of census racial data was in a minor way aggravated during Census 2000 by a sudden flare-up about Census Bureau cooperation in the 1941 internment of Japanese American citizens” (Prewitt, 2002, p. 359). Thus, given this history, the skepticism among the American public is not unfounded.

The last area that Prewitt (2002) discusses revolves around reconciling how race is measured with how the resulting classification is used in lawmaking and public policy. It is this area that is the most troubling because it highlights the very basis of how racial and ethnic census categories are inherently tied up in the use of census data to enforce civil rights legislation. Because of this complicated relationship, it also inherently means that these census categories are conflated with the traditional binary of White versus non-White and lead directly to the embedded nature of whiteness on these forms. While it is obvious that the government needs to find a better way to inform public policy decisions, the challenge comes in ascertaining how that
is going to be done, especially in the midst of the growing diversity of the American population. In light of this, the next section explores some of the objectives of the Census Bureau surrounding the collection of racial and ethnic data and talks about what the census can reasonably do to address some of these concerns.

What Can Reasonably Be Done?

In her book exploring race and the census in modern politics, Nobles (2000) spends some time exploring some of the objectives of census taking that the Census Bureau is forced to grapple with. As she points out: “Today, census taking is called upon to serve several objectives all laudable, but often at odds” (Nobles, 2000, p. 168). For example, the enforcement of civil rights legislation requires the use of past racial categorization systems- but it is based on an assumption that the way that race was constructed in the past is still salient in political, social, and economic contexts (Nobles, 2000). Furthermore, many Americans argue that the census should have the goal of accurately measuring the racial and ethnic diversity of the population – despite the fact that this goal is particularly difficult to achieve. In a sense, this is why Statistical Directive No. 15 has been changed several times since its creation in 1977. Since there are a growing number of Americans who do not see their identities reflected in the current categorization system, there has been a push to get new categories added in order to reflect this growing diversity. Thus, Nobles (2000) points out that “this objective of capturing diversity calls historical methods of categorization into question since past methods were never merely, if at all, about measuring diversity” (p. 169). Lastly, Nobles points out that “a final objective is to develop broad, statistically useful and manageable categories whose significance is separate from legislative needs and popular mobilization” (p. 169).
In a sense, the Census Bureau is being asked to do something that it has never done: be objective and stay separate from legislative needs and popular mobilization. Thus, as Skerry (2002) points out, the various challenges “facing the Census Bureau here are enormous. As race and ethnicity have become more subjective and psychological categories, they have also become more imprecise and volatile. At the same time, they are more critical than ever to public policy,” (p. 335). In light of this, the Census Bureau has had to navigate through a political minefield, while holding on to its stance of objectivity. As Skerry (2002) points out, the Census Bureau has long described itself as the fact-finder for the nation: “Precisely because the uses to which these numbers are put are so controversial and politically explosive, the Bureau must cling ever more tightly to its mantle of objectivity” (p. 335).

Given the challenges that have been placed before it, the question is what can the Census Bureau reasonably do? There is no easy answer; however, it is clear that the current way in which the census categories are used is politically unstable. If the relationship between census data and the enforcement of civil rights legislation continues, political tension will continue on both sides regarding this issue. In light of this, new possibilities will need to be explored in order to inform public policy decisions without giving up on documenting the disparities that exist in society.

Reducing Skepticism and Promoting Intersectionality

Given the prominence of the use of racial and ethnic data from census forms, it may be time to question whether it is possible to inform public policy decisions by acquiring additional types of information. Furthermore, there may be a need to reexamine what kinds of issues are addressed in public policy, along with what kinds of data would be useful in working with these
issues. In this section, I address two central areas that the Census Bureau needs to focus on in the midst of re-thinking the way that racial and ethnic categories are used on census forms. The first area involves the need for the Census Bureau to try to reduce the skepticism among the general public, and the second area involves the need to gather data on a variety of identity markers to promote intersectional analyses.

*Reducing Census Skepticism*

The notion that many Americans express skepticism towards how census data is used has already been briefly touched on; however, I re-visit it in this section because of its relationship to increasing the types of data currently collected by the census. This topic actually emerges in the counter narratives as two participants talk about why they are skeptical about how census data is used. For instance, this can be identified when Joan, a 39-year-old who self-identified as Asian American, states:

I think there needs to be – if there’s an outcome that’s really going to affect public policy or how a certain group is, is treated, or um, you know if you’re trying to figure out how to get more services for a group based on their population numbers then I think that it needs to be clearly, clearly explained about what the data is going to be used for and how they want you to report it because otherwise it just kind of leaves it up for grabs and people can kinda just answer however they like, which ultimately they will, but I think that the more guidelines that you can give people, the better they can fill it out.
This topic was also addressed by Joy, a 28-year-old who self-identified as fifth-generation Japanese American. She also agrees with Joan that the census needs to be more forthright about how the data is going to be used. She states:

I think also it would be helpful for people to know – like how in the greater sense – so not just people in academia but in general – for people to know why they are filling these out an like how it benefits them. Like with the HSRB forms sometimes, I think there’s something on there that says that you have to fill out how does this benefit the people and you show the people – you’re doing this study because this is how it benefits you. And I think that for the greater census form, it would be helpful for people to answer honestly if they knew how it was benefitting them. And even a disclaimer on how it’s not benefitting them - at least then the census is being honest with you like uh, because maybe it does benefit people but we’re just suspicious. (Joy)

All in all, these two individuals point to the fact that some of the skepticism stems from the fact that Americans are generally unsure why the census collects information and how that information is used. By bluntly informing people that their data is going to be used to impact public policy decisions, people can check their identity box accordingly (e.g., in line with self-identity choices or public policy or both). Overall, gaining the trust of the American public will not be an easy task and it will likely take a long time to accomplish this, especially given the track record that the census has had with these kinds of issues up until this point. One way that this might be accomplished is by having full-disclosure with the public after the results have been tabulated regarding how the census data in a specific community was actually used, and how it may directly benefit them. If this is done consistently, (and without any conflicting uses of
census data), the American public may get closer to the point where they can assume that the census needs their information to actually help them, not hurt them. However, the move toward reducing skepticism in order to obtain more identification data would need to be carefully constructed and guarded so that it would not get co-opted by groups with ulterior motives (i.e., how the multiracial movement was co-opted by conservatives and those who wanted to advocate against affirmative action). If the challenge of reducing the skepticism among the American public can be overcome, it will make the concept of intersectionality significantly easier to accomplish.

**Promoting Intersectionality**

People’s real life experiences have never fit neatly into the boundaries created by academic disciplines: Lives are much more complex and far reaching. Just as the social, political, economic, and psychological dimensions of everyday life are intertwined and mutually dependent, so too are the systems of inequality race, class, gender, and sexuality— that limit and restrict some people while privileging others (Weber, 1998, p. 13).

In her article, “Envisioning the Possibilities for a Good Life: Exploring the Public Policy Implications of Intersectionality Theory,” Manuel (2007) argues that “the public policy field has largely ignored the development of intersectionality theory” (p. 174). She goes on to explain that intersectionality theory “argues that our lives and the choices we make are best understood as a consequence of our social location (i.e., the intersection of race, gender, class, and other forms of identity and distinction)” (Manuel, 2007, pp. 174-175). When issues like race, gender, and class are included in policy analyses, they are often included “mainly for reasons of statistical
control’…rather than intrinsic interest in what they contribute to understanding social and economic phenomenon” (Manuel, 2007, p. 183). Part of this historically has had to do with the fact that within group differences may not offer up lessons which can be generalized to the larger population.

The argument behind intersectionality theory revolves around the idea that social categories like race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, etc. do not operate in isolation, but intersect in terms of oppression and domination. While most notably associated with feminism (hooks, 1981, 1989, 1990; Hill Collins, 1990, 1993, 1998; Spellman, 1988; Fong 1978), intersectionality has also been applied in a variety of different contexts such as mental health research (Kohn and Hudson, 2002), labor studies (Brewer, 1993; Browne and Misra, 2003), education (Cousins, 1999), law/criminal justice (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; Culp Jr., 1994), and politics (Kathlene, 1994; Garcia Bedolla and Scola, 2006). In terms of critical race theory, intersectionality has also played a role since Delgado and Stefanic (2001) point out that “no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity…everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (p. 9).

While race, class, and gender are attributes that show up most often in intersectionality research, several other identity markers are also examined as well. These include minority status, age, immigrant status, disability status, religious affiliation, region of residence, sexual orientation, family type, marital status, first language spoken, and economic markers like occupation, employment status, etc. (Manuel, 2007). In the midst of using more identity markers on census forms, it is vital to bear in mind that this is admittedly a sensitive topic, as many Americans are skeptical about the manner in which census data is used.
In addition to the identity markers, as Weber (1998) points out, several themes emerge in intersectionality scholarship. These include the fact that identity markers are contextual, socially constructed, simultaneously expressed, and represent power relationships. Other themes include the idea that the study of identity characteristically blends the macro (social structural) with the micro (socio psychological), and that intersectionality scholarship represents an interdependence of knowledge and activism. This focus on the interdependence of knowledge and activism directly relates to both critical race theory and the practice of a critical rhetoric since they both contain an activist dimension.

Despite the broad appeal of intersectional approaches, their implementation has met several challenges. Manuel (2007) points out that part of the problem is inherent in the concept itself. She states “the explicit function of identity markers is, by definition, context driven, making it difficult to capture a set of uniform theories that could be empirically tested and/or discussed in relationship to the central theories in other disciplines” (Manuel, 2007, p. 184). Furthermore, as Weber (1998) points out, this results in a variety of “debates about the most productive ways of conceptualizing race, class, gender, and sexuality; about the nature of their relationships to one another; and about their manifestations in everyday life” (p. 15).

Despite this, several scholars (Wilkinson, 2003; Hum & Simpson, 2003; Anderson, 2001) have begun to discuss effective designs for intersectional research. One of the challenges is considering which and how many identity markers to combine and examine. In light of this, several scholars (Hum and Simpson, 2003; Wilkinson, 2003) argue that the best results are obtained when qualitative and quantitative research are used in tandem because it allows for the identification of variables that are highly correlated, and it produces stronger and more convincing findings.
Since “policy scholars spend a good proportion of their time and resources measuring social well-being and the efficacy of public efforts taken to improve well-being” it is logical that this approach at least be considered in the realm of public policy decisions that are informed by census data (Manuel, 2007). While the short census form already asks questions about race and age, that information is largely collected to be used in redistricting and to enforce voting rights laws (Prewitt, 2002). Undoubtedly, there are already public policy decisions that are informed by a number of these identity markers; however, this conversation has not moved into the larger dialogue about how census data is used to enforce civil rights legislation. If this dialogue moves to a point where the discussion includes the potential use of a variety of different types of data to inform public policies which assist all different kinds of Americans, the collection of census data might be met with a bit less resistance. As Omi (2001) points out, “the challenge is to frame an appropriate language and analysis to help us understand the shifting dynamic of race that all groups are implicated in” (p. 251).

Furthermore, Omi (2001) argues that “research needs to consider how specific social policies (e.g., affirmative action, community economic development proposals) have different consequences for different groups” (p. 251). By using an intersectional approach, public policy decisions would be able to focus on the people (e.g., newly immigrant Asian groups, disenfranchised Whites, etc.) that often fall through the cracks when race is the main consideration. To be clear, my argument does not involve an end to the collection of racial/ethnic data; it does, however, point to the need to diversify data collection in order to help public policy makers reach more informed decisions.

Several other challenges are inherent in this move toward more intersectional approaches. As Manuel (2007) points out, this will also require a shift in how public policy analysts view
data collection since it is, by its very nature, reductionist and incremental. In other words, public
policy analysts often try to simplify policy solutions as much as possible, and this “simplicity
often comes at the extent of comprehensiveness” (Manuel, 2007, p. 194). Furthermore, public
policy analysts often try to resolve issues in a way that is both inexpensive and politically
feasible. However, intersectional approaches often move against this grain, since using multiple
identity markers is more time-consuming, costly, and usually more complex and difficult to
address. Thus, Manuel (2006) admits that “while public policy research may be better able to
reflect intersectional differences; crafting public policies that do address them is a much more
difficult task” (p. 195). However, despite these challenges, as Malveaux (2002) points out,
“intersectionality offers important and necessary nuances to our work around race” (p. 27). It
also provides an opportunity to use additional factors to move outside of the constraints of
whiteness.

Limitations and Future Research

In the practice of a critical rhetoric and the use of critical race theory, the focus is on
investigating the power/knowledge dynamic with the hopes of promoting change. As Delgado
and Stefanic (2001) point out, this involves looking at the construction of social roles and the
largely invisible collections of patterns and habits that make up forms of domination. McKerrow
(1989) describes it another way. He points out that it involves “uncovering a ‘dense web’ of
seemingly unconnected relationships, pulling together the disparate scraps of discourse, and
constructing an argument out of them in order to illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for
granted social practices” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 10).
In light of this, the scope of this study has been to investigate the embedded nature of whiteness in the use of racial and ethnic categories on census forms and to connect the dots between the political, legal, and social implications of these category choices. Thus, this study focused on using participants’ counter narratives to highlight some of the thematic issues at play within the master narrative and to connect those themes to the larger discussion of whiteness.

As a result, several limitations exist in relation to how this analysis evolved. First, since this study only included 20 participant narratives, it is important to point out that each counter narrative is not intended to be a representation of a certain group; thus they cannot be generalized. If identity research reveals anything, it is that each person’s social identity is a collection of a variety of different social markers and varies tremendously over time and based on the context. Thus, the stories that have been included in this study have served the primary purpose of providing an alternative version of the master narrative and the way that racial and ethnic categories are used on census forms. They were included because they continually show that checking off a racial and ethnic category is not as simple as it seems. These stories were not included to make broad speculations about the experiences of other people who also fall into the categories mentioned in this study. Their inclusion provides an opportunity for alternate stories and voices to be heard, documenting the lived inconsistencies which occur in relation to the master narrative on race and ethnicity in this country.

In addition to the number of participants, another limitation of this study surrounds my own identity as a researcher and the possibility that my identity may have influenced how each participant told their story. As a Black woman, participants may have felt more or less solidarity with me due to my race/ethnicity/gender or due to other perceptions that they may have had of me. Another limitation to this study surrounds the fact that the analysis was being completed
just before Census 2010. While the data collection for the counter narratives was completed well before the Census Bureau launched its data collection campaign, the analysis only reflects the use of racial and ethnic categories on the 1990 and 2000 census forms. Future research needs to be conducted to see if these issues are still pertinent and to identify any new thematic areas that may emerge once the data from the 2010 census is released.

Finally, the scope of this study focused largely on the embedded nature of whiteness in the use of racial and ethnic census categories. As a result of this, there were several interdisciplinary areas that could have been explored, but were largely beyond the scope of this study. Some of these areas include the relationship between racial and ethnic census data and recent immigration, citizenship, transnational adoption, genetic engineering, social geography, globalization, and multiracial identity among different racial and ethnic mixtures (e.g., White/Asian, White/Latino, versus Black/Latino, etc.) While some of these issues were touched upon briefly in this analysis, a further investigation of these areas would provide additional insight into the ways that whiteness functions within the structure of racial and ethnic census categories. Additionally, given the focus on intersectionality in public policy, future research would also benefit from investigating how different age groups think about racial and ethnic categories and also how gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc., might play a role as well.

Over the course of history, one point that has remained constant in the discussion of racial and ethnic census categories is the notion of change. Through the axis of the census, it is possible to observe an example of racial formation (Omi and Winant, 1994) and the various racial projects at work. The way that racial and ethnic categories are constructed is not an issue unique to the United States; in the midst of globalization, it is likely to become even more important as the interactions between people who have differing perceptions of these categories
continue to increase. Thus, given the impact of whiteness globally, it will be interesting to see how (or if) the embedded elements of whiteness are challenged or allowed to continue unquestioned. While there is no easy answer to fix the manner in which racial and ethnic categories have been used on U.S. census forms, this analysis seeks to take a step in the right direction by identifying areas where whiteness has been prevalent and discussing future possibilities to challenge it.

Since most oppressive systems feed on silence (Johnson, 2006), it is my hope that by breaking the silence and exploring ways to reduce the power of whiteness I can at least begin to move outside of its grasp. While I recognize that it will take a collection of numerous racial projects over a serious amount of time, (most likely centuries), to have a serious impact on the embedded nature of whiteness, this project moves in that direction. In his discussion of power, privilege, and difference, Johnson (2006) reminds us that “as powerful as systems of privilege are, they cannot stand the strain of lots of people doing something about it, beginning with the simplest act of naming the system out loud” (p. 152). Thus, by telling our stories and hearing the stories of others, it is my hope that this work “can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414).
REFERENCES


Fong, K. M. (1978). Feminism is fine, but what’s it done for Asian Americans? In C. Morago and G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (pp. 51-84). Watertown, MA: Persephone.


Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 276-

Hasian Jr., M. (2003). Performative law and the maintenance of interracial social boundaries:
Assuaging antebellum fears of "White slavery" and the case of Sally Miller/Salome Muller.
*Text and Performance Quarterly, 23*(1), 55-86.

Hassebrauk, M. (1998). Beauty is more than “name” deep: The effect of women’s first names on
ratings of physical attractiveness and personality attributes. *Journal of Applied
Psychology, 18*, 721-726.


Helms, J. E. (1994). The conceptualization of racial identity and other “racial” constructs. In E. J.
Trickett, R. J. Watts, and D. Birman (Eds.). *Human diversity: Perspectives on people in


Hill Collins, P. (1993). Toward a new vision: Race, class, and gender as categories of analysis
and connection. *Race, Sex, and Class, 1*(1), 25-45.

13*, 62-83.

Hodes, M. (1993). The sexualization of reconstruction politics: White women and Black men in
the south after the civil war. *Journal of the History of Sexuality, 3*, 402-417.


*Western Journal of Communication, 62*(2), 114-140.


### APPENDIX A
List of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-Identification</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cristina</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumeet</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mexican/Chicano</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latrice</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Black/Choctaw Indian</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Hispanic of Mexican descent</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Latino/White</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramona</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Multiracial Ethnic American</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>½ Polish, ½ Mexican</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>African American/Native American</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mexican American or Chicano American</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5th generation Japanese American</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>EnIrDanGerman or White</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participant names have been changed in this study to protect the participant’s identities.*
APPENDIX B
Recruitment Flyer/Information Sheet

Join a Dissertation Research Study Project on people’s perceptions of the racial & ethnic categories that are used on U.S. Census Forms!

“T’ve Got a Story to Tell”
RACIAL & ETHNIC CATEGORIES ON U.S. CENSUS FORMS

Have you ever been asked to provide your race & ethnicity on an application or form?

☐ White    ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ Black/African American    ☐ Hispanic/Latino
☐ Native American    ☐ Some Other Race

What is this study about?
• This study will collect information for my dissertation on how people perceive the racial & ethnic categories that are used on U.S. census forms.
• Specifically, it will surround the changes that took place on the 2000 U.S. census form where people were allowed (for the 1st time in U.S. history) to mark one or more racial/ethnic category instead of being instructed to “fill in ONLY one box.”

What will I be asked to do?
If you volunteer to participate, you will be asked to do two things:
• Use your personal experiences to write a 2-4 page short narrative (i.e. a story) about the racial & ethnic categories that are used on forms/applications and talk about how people deal with these categories in their everyday lives.
• Participate in a audio/video-taped interview to discuss the 1990/2000 racial/ethnic census questions and to discuss your narrative/personal experiences with race and ethnicity.

How long will it take?
The total time commitment for this study will be around 1-2 hours:
• Each part (i.e. the narrative & the interview) should take between 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Will my information be secure?
• All information collected will be kept strictly confidential (i.e. under lock & key) and will only be used for the purposes of this study.
• In addition, to ensure your confidentiality, I will use a pseudonym (i.e. a fake name) whenever I quote you or refer to your information.

How do I join?
• I am looking for 25-30 individuals like you to participate in this study.
• If you or someone you know are willing to participate, please contact me!

Contact Information:
Candie Muñoz
Doctoral Candidate
Bowling Green State University
(510) 610-7922 (cell)
CLEFLOR@bgsu.edu
APPENDIX C
Consent Form

I've Got a Story to Tell 229

My name is Candice Munoz and I am a doctoral student in the School of Communication Studies at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. I am conducting a study for my dissertation on how people perceive racial and ethnic categories on U.S. census forms. I am specifically interested in people’s perceptions of the changes that took place on the 2000 census form where people were allowed (for the first time in U.S. census history) to mark one or more racial/ethnic category.

You are invited to take part in this research study.

The information that is provided on this form is to help you decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research. I will be seeking approximately 25-30 adults (18 years of age or older) like you to volunteer to participate in the study. If you have any questions about this form or about the research, do not hesitate to ask me. You will be provided with a copy of this consent form for your records.

Purpose of Research: To identify people’s perceptions of the racial and ethnic categories that are used on U.S. census forms.

Description: This study consists of two parts:
1) You will be asked to use your personal experiences to write a narrative (i.e. a story) about how people are classified according to racial and ethnic categories that are presented on census forms. The narrative will be 2-4 pages, it can be typed or hand written, and you will be asked to complete it before your interview takes place.
2) You will be asked to participate in an audio/video taped interview to discuss your perceptions of the 1980 & 2000 racial & ethnic census questions and to discuss your narrative/personal experiences with race and ethnicity. The interview will last between 30 minutes to 1 hour. The total time commitment for this study will be between 1-2 hours.

Potential Benefits: This study will provide you with the opportunity to voice your stories, experiences, concerns, and/or disappointments with the way that race and ethnicity is generally constructed within U.S. society and specifically on U.S. census forms. By telling your story, you will be helping to identify similar perceptions and experiences that people have with racial/ethnic classification.

Confidentiality: All of the information that is collected (data, interview answers, narratives, consent forms, etc.) will be kept strictly confidential (i.e. stored under lock and key). It will only be used for the purposes of this study and I will be the only person who will have access to your identity. All data will be personally destroyed by me within two years after the completion of this study. In addition, to ensure your confidentiality, I will use a pseudonym (i.e. a fake name) whenever I quote you.

Participation: Your participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you do not have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. You have the right to have any questions about this study answered by me at any time.

Risks: The risks associated with this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

Contact Information: If you have any questions, you can contact me directly at (810) 610-7922 or by e-mail at: cleforn@bosei.bgsu.edu. You may also contact my advisor (Dr. Radhika Gajjala) at (419) 372-0528 or by e-mail at: radhik@bgsu.edu. Additionally, if you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).

Consent: I have read the information provided and have been informed that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time. I have also been informed that I must be at least 18 years old to participate. I consent to participate in this research study and to having the interview audio/ videotaped for the purposes of this research.

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

School of Communication Studies
302 West Hall
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403
419-372-6249
fax: 419-372-6202
www.bgsu.edu/departments/crt

AGREE TO THE ABOVE STATEMENT

BGSU HUM - APPROVED FOR USE
ID: 1005186697
EFFECTIVE: 3-7-08
EXPIRES: 1-29-09
“I’ve Got a Story to Tell” Research Project

For over 200 years, the United States Census Bureau has categorized people according to distinct separate racial groups by instructing people to “Fill in ONLY one box” when they answered race-based questions. While the number of racial and ethnic categories has changed over time; since 1977, the U.S. Census Bureau has recognized 5 “official” racial and ethnic groups (White, Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, and Hispanic). In the year 2000, for the first time in the nation’s history, individuals were instructed and allowed to mark off one or more racial and ethnic categories when filling out their census forms. Can you think of any stories, examples, experiences, memories that you have encountered (personally or through someone else) that relate to how people are classified according to racial and ethnic categories.

Please tell me your story using the space provided below!!!
APPENDIX E
Census Question Handout- Page #1

#1: Please fill out this excerpt from the 1990 Census Form & describe why you answered the question the way that you did.

4. Race
   Fill ONE circle for the race that the person considers himself/herself to be.
   If Indian (Amér.), print the name of the enrolled or principal tribe.
   If Other Asian or Pacific Islander (API), print one group, for example: Hmong, Fijian, Latvian, Thai, Tongan, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.
   If Other race, print race.

   ○ White
   ○ Black or Negro
   ○ Indian (Amér.) (Print the name of the enrolled or principal tribe.)
     ────────
     ○ Eskimo
     ○ Alutik
     ○ Asian or Pacific Islander (API)
     ○ Chinese
     ○ Japanese
     ○ Filipino
     ○ Asian Indian
     ○ Hawaiian
     ○ Samoan
     ○ Korean
     ○ Guamanian
     ○ Vietnamese
     ○ Other API

   ○ Other race (Print race)

7. Is this person of Spanish/Hispanic origin?
   Fill ONE circle for each person.
   If Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic,
   print one group.

   ○ No (not Spanish/Hispanic)
   ○ Yes, Mexican, Mexican-Am., Chicano
   ○ Yes, Puerto Rican
   ○ Yes, Cuban
   ○ Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic
     (Print one group, for example: Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Mosquero, Salteño, Spanish, and so on.)

   ────────
APPENDIX E (cont.)
Census Question Handout- Page #2

#2: Please fill out this excerpt from the 2000 Census Form & describe why you answered the question the way that you did.

NOTE: Please answer BOTH Questions 5 and 6.

5. Is this person Spanish/Hispanic/Latino? Mark ✓ the "No" box if not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.
   - No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
   - Yes, Puerto Rican
   - Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
   - Yes, Cuban
   - Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino — Print group.

6. What is this person’s race? Mark ✓ one or more races to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be.
   - White
   - Black, African Am., or Negro
   - American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.
   - Asian Indian
   - Japanese
   - Native Hawaiian
   - Chinese
   - Korean
   - Guamanian or Chamorro
   - Filipino
   - Vietnamese
   - Samoan
   - Other Asian — Print race
   - Other Pacific Islander — Print race
   - Some other race — Print race.
#3: Please answer the question listed below & describe why you answered the question the way that you did.

What is your race and/or ethnicity?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Explanation:
APPENDIX F
Interview Questions

- When you think of race and ethnicity, what are some of the categories that come to mind?
  - Do you think that these categories accurately represent the race and ethnicity of the U.S. population?

- Can you tell me a little about your experiences and perceptions of the use of racial and ethnic census categories (e.g., about what you wrote on the story collection form)?

- Address any specific questions that emerged in their “story”…

- When was the first time that you thought about your racial and ethnic identity (i.e., what is your earliest memory?)

- Do you have any strong or prominent memories or experiences to share about racial and ethnic classification in our country? (about you or other people)

- If you had to explain the terms “race” and “ethnicity,” how would you define them?

- Have you ever felt any tension or resistance about how you identify yourself racially or ethnically? Or as a result of how other people (e.g., parents, strangers, family members, siblings, administrators, etc.) identify you?

- What types of racial or ethnic categories do you usually use to describe yourself?
  - Are these the same categories that other people use to describe you?
    - If no, what types of categories have other people used to describe your race or ethnicity?

- Would you say that it is: important or not that important for people to fully represent their racial and ethnic ancestry in their category choices. Why?

- Do you think that different sets of categorization systems influence how you see, label, or interact with other people in terms of race and ethnicity?

- Do you think that any racial or ethnic categories are more privileged over others in our society? If so, which ones and why.

- Do you think that there is any benefit (in our society now or historically) to being racially categorized as “White” or “minority” on official forms like the census, employment, educational, mortgage applications, or bank loans? Explain your answer.

- Do you remember when the Census Bureau made changes to the 2000 census? If so, do you recall what your initial reaction was?
APPENDIX F (cont.)
Interview Questions

- When you were filling out the census questions, how did you categorize yourself according to: the 1990 Census question, the 2000 Census question, and the fill in the blank question?

- If you answered the questions differently, can you tell me which question most closely reflects how you see yourself?
  o Which one is furthest away from how you see yourself?

- Did you feel any tension/uncertainty when you were filling out these questions? If so, which parts and why?

- Do you think that there are any advantages or disadvantages to the way that race and ethnicity was categorized on the: 1990 census or the 2000 census?

- Can you think of any social rules (or guidelines) that are used in U.S. society regarding how people are categorized according to race and ethnicity?
  o Can you think of any guidelines that should exist regarding how people are classified according to race and ethnicity?

- What are your thoughts regarding having people “fill in ONE circle” versus allowing them to “mark one or more races”?

- Do you think that changes need to be made regarding how race and ethnicity is categorized on census forms? If so, explain.
  o What suggestions do you have for making these changes?

- Should census data on race and ethnicity be used to inform public policy decisions (e.g., the distribution of resources, etc.) or should it just be an indication of each individual’s self-identification, or both?