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Objective Subjects, Empirical Identities: Psychology's Measurement of Ethnic Identity and
Critical Race and Ethnicity Theory

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—Acknowledgments—

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—Introduction—

Duking It Out: Psychology and Global Cultural Studies

I believe that the personal is and should be closely tied to the work we do in academia. The work I am interested in, the ways in which I approach my studies, and the questions I ask are all shaped by my own subjectivity. As an immigrant to the United States who has grown up below the poverty line for most of my life, I have noticed that the ivory tower is not yet accessible to students like me. Nor is the kind of work produced here often influenced by those who have lived "underprivileged" lives. I have thus faced several challenges during my time as an undergraduate student at Duke University, one of which has been trying to reconcile the realization that, on the one hand, knowledge is constructed with, on the other hand, the rigidity of the theories and methodologies of my Psychology major. To provide more context as to what I mean, I would like to start this introduction off by providing some background information about myself (my personal development) and how I was led to my majors at Duke (my scholarly development), experiences central to the making of this honors thesis.

As a kid, I was highly attuned to my own thoughts and spent a lot of time "in my head." In particular, I often wondered about why the kids at my school, while similar to me in countless ways, were also so very different. My classmates, like me, weren't rich; in fact, we were all poor. Our parents didn't speak English, so when we went home after school, we always had to speak in Spanish (and we often wondered, hey, why did none of our teachers speak any Spanish? Was there something wrong with us?) Sometimes, our parents would even hand us these pretty, colorful flags and tell us to wave them around and be proud. *¿Pero mami, be proud of what?* These flags didn't look anything like the one waving out on the biggest pole in the world, the one right outside of our school and in all of our classrooms. Plus, how come the food we ate at home

was so different from the kind we ate at school? How come we didn't look like the kids on the Disney Channel? Our parents couldn't tell us. It was always just: be proud, be proud, be proud. Respect your elders. Eat some more rice and beans. And, most importantly, never, ever forget where you come from.

Despite our similarities at home, I noticed that my classmates and I faced radically different experiences in school. For whatever reason, I did really well in my classes and never got into trouble.[1] Many of my classmates, however, struggled with the material we were learning and were frequently given detention or even suspended. In the fourth grade, the first time I was placed on the honor roll, my favorite teacher recommended me for the Gifted & Talented program at my school (in other words, I was placed on a track). By the fifth grade, I was consistently making the A/B honor roll, and by sixth, the straight A honor roll. By the time I was graduating high school, I had become the Valedictorian of my school and was off to Duke University, the first in my family to go to college. But…what about all of my peers? They cared about their education, so what happened to them? Where were they? Why weren't they up there beside me? These questions would be the first of many that would eventually lead me to declare my major in Psychology.

Given my personal experience in the public-school system, I wanted to understand why it was that my friends and I experienced such different educational outcomes despite our shared backgrounds. My first major, Psychology, was selected with the intention of studying the psychological factors contributing to the racial/ethnic disparities in public education. For

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[1] Looking back, some of the factors I attribute to my getting into Duke include the privileges of being White-passing (i.e., growing up as a Latina coded as White or as a White Latina), having strong support systems at my schools (i.e., teachers who believed in me), and, of course, having strong and brilliant immigrant parents who always pushed me to succeed and worked "como animales" so that I could focus on nothing else but my studies. While I of course "worked hard," I try to avoid employing the myth of meritocracy as the reason I've succeeded; I cannot ignore or brush aside the influence the sociocultural context around me has had in shaping me so that my hard work could *actually* pay off.

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instance, I was interested in the ways in which psychological factors, such as perceptions of

discrimination, contributed to educational outcomes (e.g. dropping out from high school). As I

began to ask more questions, however, I came to see certain limitations in the work I was doing

in psychology; the new questions I began to ask were more theoretical and philosophical in

nature and beyond the scope of the individual and immediate sociocultural context. Indeed, I

came to realize that there were too many factors operating outside of or beyond the individual—

systemic factors, one could say—that really influenced where, how, and why I ended up where I

(and my peers) did.

These realizations really began after taking two courses with Professor Antonio Viego in

Global Cultural Studies in the Program in Literature at Duke: Introduction to Psychoanalytic

Theory, at the end of my second year, and Introduction to Latina/o Studies, at the beginning of

my third year. During my semester taking Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory, I learned, in

more detail, about Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis. I confess that before taking Professor

Viego's course, I was extremely hesitant. I ended up taking it anyway to fulfill a graduation

requirement (an "Arts, Literature, and Performance" credit, part of the current "Trinity

Requirements," or "T-Reqs," for students enrolled in the Trinity College of Arts & Sciences). I

was hesitant because, in prior Psychology courses, I had already learned about Sigmund Freud

and his theories about the Oedipus Complex, the unconscious, the id, ego, and the superego, and

the psychosexual stages of development. Psychology had a lot to say about Freud, and it wasn't

generally positive. Most lectures on Freud began by mocking him as the kooky theorist who

believed boys secretly want to have sex with their mothers. Thus, the overall response to Freud

was a dismissive one because of the lack of empirical evidence supporting his claims.[2] In

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[2] I should add that in most of the psychology courses I've taken at Duke, professors often provide a list of "pros and cons" to Freud's work. Nowadays, Psychology views one of Freud's biggest contributions—the notion of the unconscious—as paving the way for empirical work on the subconscious (which, per the experiments in this area,

Professor Viego's course, however, I had the opportunity to read essays that Freud himself wrote and learned to directly analyze *and* appreciate his work (which was both "advanced for his time" and a "product of the time"). This, I felt, was more productive and intellectually stimulating than being given a list of "pros and cons" to memorize (as was the case in my psychology courses).

To explain how this course influenced me to think about psychology differently, allow me to briefly segue into one of the most personally influential assignments I completed for Professor Viego's course: a position paper on Adam Phillips's *Becoming Freud: The Making of a Psychoanalyst.* In that paper, I examined the relationship between biographer and biographee by focusing on Freud's disdain for biographies (as told by his "anti-biographer," Phillips). The latter part of Phillips's introduction includes a letter Freud wrote to his fiancée, Martha Bernays in which he wrote to her that he had destroyed all his notes, letters, and manuscripts from the past fourteen years in an attempt to frustrate his future biographers. There, Freud referred to himself as a "hero," and claimed that "each one of them," "them" being the biographers, "[would] be right in [their] opinion of 'The Development of the Hero,'" and that he was "already looking forward to seeing them go astray" (25). By destroying his papers, Freud had final control over their interpretation. In so doing, however, he assumed that the absence of his documents would "lead to more distortion of his life story, rather than less," (70) suggesting that if his biographers had everything, they may have gotten it right. Phillips argues that by destroying his own papers, Freud believed in the truth, or the possible accuracy, of his biographers. Freud wanted to die knowing that he wasn't known; he wanted to be his own biographer and thus "die in his own fashion" (71).

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can be tapped into via subliminal techniques such as priming. Priming involves flashing a word or an image on a screen too quickly for a participant to see/notice but just fast enough to be subconsciously processed by the brain. The idea here is that the message that is subconsciously processed will impact how a participant feels, thinks, or behaves on subsequent tasks designed by researchers).

The question I became interested in in that paper, then, was whether anyone could *really* "die in [their] own fashion." While learning about Freud, I also had the opportunity to learn about Jacques Lacan and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Per the Lacanian school of thought, language is the structure that transforms human organisms into subjects.[3] It is, however, riddled with gaps and glitches as a result of the endless deferment of meaning from one word to the next, suggesting that we, as subjects, are also split. How can split subjects operating within a broken linguistic structure truly be so sure of themselves? In a world where reality is an effect of the order of signifiers, of language, how can we know ourselves, and how can we say our versions of our stories are truer than those others create for us? In other words: could Freud even have gotten his own story right? How can we ever be sure that our truth is ours alone rather than inextricably bound to the "truth" others invent of and for us within the very same structure? In *Side Effects,*

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[3] In my training through the Psychology department at Duke, I have been taught to avoid using the term "subject" when referring to people (and to opt for the term "participant" instead). My understanding of this is that Psychology (broadly-speaking) views the term "subject" as objectifying, and, in that way, dehumanizing (or, some say, demeaning). In fact, though the American Psychological Association states: "…although descriptive terms such as *college students, children*, or *respondents* provide precise information about the individuals taking part in a research project, the more general terms *participants* and *subjects* are also in common usage. Indeed, for more than 100 years the term *subjects* has been used within experimental psychology as a general starting point for describing a sample, and its use is appropriate" ("What is the Difference," emphasis in original), there has been much controversy over the usages of "subject' versus "participant." Some scholars in psychology, for example, have called for the banning of the term "subject" to refer to people who participate in research (See: Chalmers, "People are 'participants' in research," who argues the use of "subject" is demeaning, and Furedy, "Subjects vs. Participants," who argues that there is an epistemological difference between "participants" and "subjects," the latter making no direct epistemological contribution; See also: Roediger, "What Should They Be Called?"). In my training through Global Cultural Studies in the Program in Literature, however, I have been taught the converse; referring to people as "subjects" brings attention to their positioning within society and the sociocultural context in which they live. That is to say, the term "subject" already presupposes that we are all subjected to inescapable power structures outside of us. In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," for example, Louis Althusser notes that "you and I are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly practice rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantees for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects" (117). Individuals, according to Althusser, are thus "always-already" subjects by virtue of their interpellation into ideology, their transformation from individuals into subjects, which occurs when they are hailed (e.g. a police officer calling out "Hey, you there!" to which the individual [recognizing it is them who is being hailed], turns around, responds to the call, and is recruited into ideology, transformed into a subject) (118-119). In the next chapter, I will discuss this in more depth when I introduce Rey Chow's *coercive mimeticism.* For now, it should suffice to say that the term "subject," as used in this project, differs from the commonplace use of the term, as appears to be the case in psychology. By referring to people as "subjects," the power structures that interpellate concrete individuals into concrete subjects is made visible, and, in doing so, seeks to *humanize* rather than dehumanize or demean people by affirming the existence of the structures of power that we are all, as subjects, ascribed to. This issue of terms is one example of the kind of "problems" or "misunderstandings" that can arise when working in two highly distinct fields (and trying to bring them into conversation, as I do in this project).

for example, Phillips points out that during psychoanalysis, the past of an analyst plays a role in the course of the interpretation of the lives of analysands. What an analysand learns about themselves during therapy through the analyst is thus never "pure"; what we learn about ourselves carries with it residues of the other. This line of thinking led me to begin asking questions of my Psychology major and how it is that it produces "objective" knowledge as a discipline. I will return to this point momentarily.

In Introduction to Latina/o Studies, the second course I took through Global Cultural Studies in the Literature Program, we read a chapter from Rey Chow's *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that completely changed how I thought about ethnic identity. In "Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation," Chow coined the term *coercive mimeticism* to refer to the ways in with ethnic subjects are expected to come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic. This concept, which I will explain at length in the following chapter, changed how I thought about work on/with Latinx participants in Psychology, specifically with regard to ethnic identity.[4] For example, I began to wonder about *who* counted as Latinx, and from there, *what* constituted Latinx ethnic identity ("eating more rice and beans"?) The umbrella term "Latinx," is, after all, a socially constructed identity; how, then, was this particular identity constructed? Under what circumstances, and by whom? Mainstream psychology doesn't ask these questions, and, as I will show in the next chapter, prefers to impose its own constructions of what counts as "ethnic-ness."[5]

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[4] There is a long-standing debate in the field of Latinx Studies regarding the term "Latino" (and "Hispanic") that goes beyond the scope of this honors thesis. Throughout this thesis, I will use the term "Latinx," a gender-neutral version of "Latino/a," to refer to people with roots in Latin America (encompassing descendants from different indigenous groups as well as Spanish conquistadores in Latin America). When citing from a source that uses different terms, I will use the source's terms. For more on the "Latino-Hispanic" debate, see: Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity.*

[5] Fox, Prilleltensky, and Austin define mainstream psychology as "the psychology that universities most often teach and that clinicians, researchers, and consultants most often practice," which presents psychology as "a science whose researchers use objective methods to understand human behavior and whose practitioners help individuals cope with distress" (3).

As I became increasingly curious about the ways in which our social word was constructed, I began to learn more about power and its role in shaping these identities. I began to wonder about how psychology researchers measured and interpreted these complex constructs in their studies. That is, I became curious as to how interpretations of findings pertaining to ethnic subjects' motivations, thoughts, perceptions, emotions, behaviors, and so forth, are a product of and challenge or reproduce a greater social ideology (or, in this case, the predominant ideologies of a discipline, which themselves reflect the greater social sphere). As I continued to ask more questions about the very conceptualizations and assumptions under which psychology operated, I was eventually led to declare my second major, Global Cultural Studies. It has really been within Global Cultural Studies, I feel, that I have been able to ask the questions most interesting to me without concerns regarding the overstepping of arbitrary disciplinary lines.

Global Cultural Studies offered me tools, like critical race and ethnicity theory, that allowed me to see my work in psychology differently, leading me to realize that the theories guiding my work in psychology were epistemically positioned in a particular way and relied on certain givens that I had not previously considered. Given that Global Cultural Studies, and particularly Latinx Studies, are radically interdisciplinary fields of knowledge production encompassing a range of theories and methodologies, I came to realize that I could pursue my work in Latinx psychology and education through Global Cultural Studies. I work and think in an interdisciplinary way, and Global Cultural Studies has offered me several avenues through which I could approach my work. Ultimately, I chose Global Cultural Studies and Psychology as my majors out of a committed passion for understanding Latinx social realities in the United States, how and why these social realities exist, and what can be done to change them.

This thesis is thus my attempt to explore questions that I consider to be the outcome of the meeting place between psychology and critical race and ethnicity theory. What might it look

like to bring in thinking from critical race and ethnicity theory and apply it to psychology's

understanding of ethnic identity? Can these two fields be made to speak to each other, or are they

so inherently incompatible that any attempt to do so would prove futile? As I work through these

questions, I want to bring attention to three major points I will track in the following chapters: 1)

There is a problem with how ethnic identity is conceptualized in quantitative psychological

research, specifically in its lack of sociocultural and historical texture; 2) There is a need to

recognize the constructed nature of the terms and concepts psychologists use in their work and

apply critical perspectives to the theory and methodology used in the field; and 3) There is a

need for reflexivity on the part of researchers such that they acknowledge that they, and the work

that they produce, are products of a particular historical moment, that they are reflective of the

current Zeitgeist. These points and the work I am doing in this thesis can be thought of as lying

at the intersection between psychology, critical race and ethnicity theory, and Latinx studies.

In the following chapter, "Coercive *MEIM*eticism: How Psychology Keeps Them in

Their Place," I will focus exclusively on psychology's conceptualization of ethnic identity by

analyzing *The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)*, a popular quantitative ethnic

identity survey. I will also engage in close readings of three mainstream psychology studies that

use the *MEIM* on Latinx children and students to trace how researchers interpret their findings

relating to ethnic identity, providing alternative readings informed by critical race and ethnicity

theory. I should note that I cannot possibly canvass the enormous amount of literature produced

in psychology; thus, I do not intend for my coverage to be representative of the entire field.

Instead, I am specifically focusing on three studies emerging primarily in child development and

education between the years of 2012-2016.[6]

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[6] With the exception of one study, which focuses on college-aged students.

Chapter 2, "In and Against Psychology: Towards a Critical Psychology of Ethnic Identity," explores an emerging (and still somewhat marginalized) subfield in psychology that can be thought of as a space open to critical race and ethnicity theory. More specifically, I trace the emergence of critical psychology and outlines a few of its most prominent epistemological frameworks and critiques of mainstream psychology. Afterwards, I deliberate on its potential contributions to mainstream psychology's conceptualizations of ethnic identity and, in light of the current political landscape, on the possibilities it opens up for critical, transformative work within, and against, psychology.

Before moving to chapter 1, I want reiterate that throughout my undergraduate career at Duke, I have spent a great deal of time thinking about and engaging with the kind of work produced in my two majors. It is important that this thesis is understood as emerging from my own experiences in the context of this elite institution. One of the messages Duke has drilled into my mind while I have been an undergraduate here has been the importance and value of interdisciplinary work. Duke has, for example, countless certificate programs, majors, initiatives, programs, and research teams that all boast about their interdisciplinary lens. To highlight Duke's claim about its approach to interdisciplinary work, I would like to pull a quote from its "Interdisciplinary Studies" website, which states: "Duke University's culture of interdisciplinary collaboration attracts exceptional faculty and students, adds a critical dimension to teaching and promotes study at the frontiers of research" (*Interdisciplinary Studies*). Another statement from the same website more clearly states the importance of interdisciplinary work:

> Addressing the challenges of today's world demands going beyond the limits of specialized knowledge production and transmission to create new forms of understanding and expertise. Tackling health, environmental, ethical and political challenges requires the ability to consider multiple aspects of the same issue, to

work with experts across disciplines and to integrate disparate bodies of

knowledge. Duke's approach to liberal arts education, research and teaching gives

students opportunities to become experts in traditional disciplines while

simultaneously exploring broad themes of study, which often cut across

disciplines, departments and methods.[7]

Both of these statements make strong claims about Duke's commitment to solving problems by

pulling work from multiple disciplines; Duke is described as having a "culture of

interdisciplinary collaboration" (*Interdisciplinary Studies*), wherein its specific "approach to

liberal arts education…cut[s] across disciplines, departments, and methods" ("Education").[8,9]

The ways in which these statements read make it appear as if interdisciplinary work at Duke is

effortless and always welcomed with open arms. I have, however, noticed something quite

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[7] "Education," *Interdisciplinary Studies*.

[8] Currently, Duke offers 21 different certificates. Certificates are different from minors specifically because of their interdisciplinary nature: "[t]he chief difference is that a minor is focused on the specific discipline of a particular department whereas a certificate often spans multiple disciplines or departments" ("Certificates: Certificates vs. Minors – What's the Difference?" *Trinity College of Arts & Sciences*). I am currently pursuing the Child Policy Research certificate, which allows students to combine courses from psychology, sociology, education, economics, and public policy. Aside from the certificate, Duke also offers an "Interdepartmental major" and a "Program II major," both of which are interdisciplinary. The interdepartmental major "give[s] [students] a lot of flexibility in crafting [their] educational experience--allowing [them] to integrate the disciplines of two different fields" ("Interdepartmental Major." *Trinity College of Arts & Sciences*). Program II was established in 1968 to "provide students in Trinity College the option to design their own degree program," serving the needs of students "whose intellectual interests cross departmental boundaries or who perceive areas of learning in clusters other than those offered in majors available in Program I" ("About Program II." *Program II*). Finally, I want to point out that as I write this thesis, Duke University's Trinity College of Arts & Sciences is and has been undergoing a process of rethinking changes in its core undergraduate curriculum via the "Imagining the Duke Curriculum Committee." According to its webpage, the committee is tasked with revising the curriculum in ways that address three questions, one of which hones in on the importance of interdisciplinary work: "In its present educational context, can the logic of the curriculum be clarified and simplified? Does the curriculum have a capacity to draw out and challenge students' curiosity and creativity? Does the curriculum have a capacity to *reap the full benefits of the disciplinary and interdisciplinary work of a research university*?" ("Imagining the Duke Curriculum Committee: Committee Charge." *Trinity Administration,* emphasis added).

[9] One prominent example of interdisciplinary research that comes to mind is Duke's Bass Connections program which "…brings together Duke faculty and students to explore real-world issues in interdisciplinary research teams" (*Bass Connections*). I have personally participated in two different Bass Connections teams (in the Education and Human Development cluster) during my time at Duke, both of which have been interdisciplinary in the sense that they combine education and policy.

interesting: my own discomfort and anxiety in attempting to expand the kind of thinking that predominates the field of psychology (at least at this elite research institution).

My effort to bring Psychology and Global Cultural Studies into conversation has been an onerous task that I have found to be more difficult and daunting than I had ever anticipated. Though psychology insists upon the importance of challenging its dominant theories to push the field further, I believe I have perhaps pushed the boundaries in psychology too far for its own comfort. All of this to say, I deliberately chose to write this project in Global Cultural Studies in the Program in Literature rather than in the Psychology department because I did not feel supported by my Psychology major to engage in this kind of interdisciplinary work. Last summer, for example, I presented research I had conducted through the Psychology department on first-generation college students' feelings of belonging and perceptions of discrimination in the first two years of college at The Duke Endowment. While there, I had the opportunity to have lunch with the Duke Psychology & Neuroscience Department's Director of Undergraduate Studies. He asked me about my honors thesis and, after telling him about it, I was met with a discouraging comment about the "dangers" of "[that] kind of work." Highly respected mentors of mine in psychology have also dismissed the kind of theoretical work I have learned about through my Global Cultural Studies major by laughing away "whatever it is they teach students over in Literature." The overall sentiment I have felt from Duke's Psychology department is that this kind of work is not rigorous because it has not been empirically verified via the scientific method.[10] I will respond to this point in chapter 2, when I examine psychology's adherence to positivist values.

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[10] It is worth noting that Duke's Psychology department's full title is the "Department of Psychology & Neuroscience." Thus, one can say that at Duke, Psychology aligns itself strongly with Neuroscience, to the point of combining their departments into one. One of the long-running debates in the field of psychology is whether it is "a science." From what I have seen at Duke, it seems that Psychology wants to align itself with the natural sciences as much as possible (and away from the humanities). In chapter 2, I will revisit this topic using Ariane Bazan's "The Role of Biology in the Advent of Psychology: Neuropsychoanalysis and the Foundation of a Mental Life of

These experiences with this strand of interdisciplinary work at Duke have thus not only

brought to my attention departmental elitism and the hierarchization of programs of study

(including the marginalization of the humanities), but have also fueled my own struggles with

being "caught in the middle" between my two majors. This is thus an anxious honors thesis,

written by an anxious undergraduate student attempting to integrate her scholarly interests

between her two majors in an institution that claims to have a culture of interdisciplinary

collaboration while simultaneously making invisible many of the difficulties that emerge when

attempting to bring two fields into conversation. In "Theorizing the Neuroscientific Turn—

Critical Perspectives on a Translational Discipline," Melissa Littlefield and Jenell Johnson write

about the European Neuroscience and Society Network (ENSN) and its "fundamentally

*trans*disciplinary" scholarship, which helps to "bridge the gaps between the neurosciences, the

humanities, and the social sciences" (2, emphasis in original). They note that:

> Transdisciplinarity "does not simply mean laying two or more disciplines next to
>
> each other. Rather, it means to set about a question simultaneously taking into
>
> account visions and methods on the same topic from seemingly different
>
> perspectives" (ENSN 2008). Moreover, *transdisciplinary* also points to the
>
> significant challenges researchers may encounter that arise from profound
>
> "differences in research methods, work styles, and epistemologies" (Klein 2004,
>
> 520) when scholars from radically different academic backgrounds attempt to
>
> merge their work together.[11]

Causality." However, for now I will say that psychology's alignment with the natural sciences began in the nineteenth century as a political move for "a 'new' science" (Teo "Theoretical Psychology" 120). This has resulted in psychology's belief that it produces natural and scientific explanations of its findings.

[11] Littlefield, and Johnson, "Theorizing the Neuroscientific Turn—Critical Perspectives on a Translational Discipline," 2-3.

Littlefield and Johnson view transdisciplinarity as a process through which members from different fields work together to develop and share theoretical and methodological frameworks that "integrate but also *transcend their respective disciplinary perspectives*" (3, emphasis in original). Though I am not working with a member from a different field, I am working *within* two different fields. As a result of the different research methods and epistemologies of my two majors, I have experienced the significant challenges Littlefield and Johnson note as occurring in transdisciplinary work. This honors thesis can really be thought of as an attempt to think through the struggles I have experienced in the last couple of years in working to make compatible the competing logics that operate in these different disciplines. Duke's statements about interdisciplinary work ultimately make invisible the unacknowledged conflicts in interdisciplinary research projects; one of my aims is therefore to bring these conflicts to light, put them on display, and imagine alternatives.

I cannot discount the influence my personal story and my academic experiences at Duke have had in the making of this project. Both my personal background and the struggles I have faced as a Psychology and Global Cultural Studies major at Duke, at this historic moment in time, have led me to ask the questions I am asking. The reflexivity I am practicing here is precisely what I have in mind for psychology when I point out its need to consider the historical constructedness of its cherished theoretical frameworks in the following chapters.

—**Chapter 1**—

Coercive *MEIM*eticism: How Psychology Keeps Them in Their Place

> *Coercive mimeticism [is] a process…in which those who are marginal to mainstream Western culture are expected, by way of what Albert Memmi calls "the mark of the plural," to resemble and replicate the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them, a process in which they are expected to objectify themselves in accordance with the already seen and thus to authenticate the familiar imagings of them as ethnics.*
> —Rey Chow, "Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation"

> *In this country, people come from a lot of different cultures and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or* ethnic groups *that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Mexican-American, Hispanic, Black, Asian-American, American Indian, Anglo-American, and White. Every person is born into an ethnic group, or sometimes two groups, but people differ on how important their* ethnicity *is to them, how they feel about it, and how much their behavior is affected by it. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.*
> *Please fill in:*
> *In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be_____*
> —Jean S. Phinney, *The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)*

Coupled together, these two epigraphs are reflective of the kind of tensions that emerge

when different fields, in this case Global Cultural Studies and Psychology, produce constructions

of ethnicity identity (or of that which constitutes ethnicity, of that which is believed to mark a

subject as "ethnic") that can be said to be theoretically and ideologically incompatible. The first

epigraph describes *coercive mimeticism,* a term coined by cultural critic Rey Chow in *The*

Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Coercive mimeticism is an idea central to this

chapter and reflects the kind of work one might position as using critical race and ethnicity

theory.[12] It is, as Chow construes it, a form of mimicry whereby ethnic subjects are "expected to

come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic," or, in other words, come to embody "an image

[that is] a stereotyped view of the ethnic" (107).

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[12] Though it can also be located within literary theory and criticism, postcolonial studies, and ethnic studies.

In *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience*, Chow pulls from Walter Benjamin's writings on human language to point out that the debasing utterances used to "name the other" result in a mimicry, in a production of similarity, that is mediated by a "proto-sociopolitical move" (3). This act of naming and mimicking others subsequently becomes the method through which knowledge is derived from the world; the name is where "symbolic correspondence…[is] established" and an identity is "confer[red] upon" that which is named (Chow *Not Like* 4). When this naming is applied to humans, however, it is transformed from a simple designation to a *call*, imposed upon the person who is named such that the person becomes visually objectified the instant they are "hailed into existence" (Chow *Not Like* 4).

Expanding upon this act of hailing to explain how it is that ethnic subjects come to internalize cultural stereotypes of themselves, Chow invokes Louis Althusser's concept of the interpellation of subjects into ideology, which consists of a hailing, or an anonymous call ("Hey, you there!"), followed by 180-degree-turn by the hailed person in response to the call (the "Yes, that's me" moment). Chow thus conceives of ethnic identity in "multicultural Western society" through "the irrational process of being interpellated" whereby subjects become that which they are hailed as ("Keeping Them" 110). To perform ethnicity, then, is to enact a kind of mimicry of "the automatized stereotypes that are dangled out there in public, hailing the ethnic: 'Hey you! You X!'" (Chow "Keeping Them" 110).[13]

Returning to the epigraphs, one might thus see how the second, pulled from Jean S. Phinney's *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM),* is in opposition to the first. The second epigraph is a prompt describing ethnicity, indicative of how the construct is theorized within the

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[13] On page 110 of "Keeping Them in Their Place," Chow pulls from Slavoj Žižek to addresses the question of agency and "the politics that surrounds it." Chow tells us that, per Žižek, "the subject always resists…[the] *terror of complete freedom* rather than the ideological, institutional process of being interpellated" (110, emphasis in original). Identity, then, is the result of the "imposition of rules from the outside" along with the "resistance against such an imposition" *and* the result of "*unconscious automatization, impersonation, or mimicking*" (110). For more on Žižek see: Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* and Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology."

field of psychology. When taking the *MEIM*, participants are to read the prompt and then answer something akin to the call described by Chow: "In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be_____." Here, subjects are hailed (the "Hey, you there!" moment) and, in writing down their ethnic group following the prompt provided by Phinney, respond to the call (the "Yes, that's me" moment). After responding to Phinney's call, participants are asked to rank themselves in accordance to various "elements of ethnic identity" in order to determine the *strength* of their ethnic identity, or in a Chowian sense, the degree to which they are "recognizably ethnic" ("Keeping Them" 107).

Due to the top-down, categorical nature of quantitative psychological research, measures of ethnic identity are susceptible to presenting an inherently "stereotyped view of the ethnic," wherein ethnic subjects are boxed-in, confined, and restricted to the simplistic and essentialist elements that constitute survey items.[14] Quantitative research on ethnic identity requires that the construct be *quantified,* leading researchers to analyze ethnic identity comparatively such that certain ethnic subjects' identities are viewed as containing *more* or *less* "ethnic-ness" than others. What, however, are these elements assumed to constitute "ethnic-ness"?

In this chapter, I aim to map out the ways in which ethnic identity has been conceptualized and measured in psychological research, focusing on Jean S. Phinney's widely used measure of ethnic identity, the *MEIM*. First, I will analyze the constituting elements of ethnic identity that researchers in psychology have outlined for purposes of quantitative assessment. Afterwards, I will direct my attention to specific studies in order to illustrate the ways in which conceptualizations of ethnic identity are passed down from study to study, how

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[14] In this chapter, I am using "essentialist" to refer to the view that in order to "qualify" as having a particular ethnic identity, one must embody a specific set of qualities and perform particular behaviors that have been prescribed to an ethnic group from the outside. Survey items in quantitative research require rigid boundaries, placing ethnic subjects as having or lacking qualities (or falling somewhere along a continuum) that have been deemed to constitute their ethnic identity. Depending on where they fall, researchers may categorize them as subjects with "strong" or "weak" ethnic identities.

findings based on such constructions are interpreted, and how they lead to limitations in

psychological research that often go unrecognized.

The *MEIM* and Its Essential(ist) Elements

In 1992, the *Journal of Adolescent Research* published Jean S. Phinney's "The

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure: A New Scale for Use with Diverse Groups." In this article,

Phinney aimed to create a measure of ethnic identity that could be used in assessing diverse

groups. Since its publication, the *MEIM* has been used in numerous studies spanning a variety of

journals in psychology, including: *Child Development,* the *Journal of Counseling Psychology,*

Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, the *Journal of Adolescent Research,* and the

Journal of Applied Social Psychology, to name a few.[15] Currently, Phinney's article has been

cited 3,413 times, making it safe to say that it has left a mark on psychology's understanding of

ethnic identity.[16] Given its influence within the field, the *MEIM*'s formulation of ethnic identity

will serve as the primary source for understanding how ethnic identity has been theorized and

measured within psychology.[17]

In Phinney's article, ethnic identity is conceptualized as "an aspect of a person's social

identity…as that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his or her knowledge of

membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance

attached to that membership" (156). This definition of ethnic identity was created by the British

social psychologist Henri Tajfel in his 1981 book *Human Groups and Social Categories* and has

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[15] See: Cokley, "Critical Issues in the Measurement of Ethnic and Racial Identity: A Referendum on the State of the field."

[16] Retrieved on October 2nd, 2016 using Google Scholar's citation counts function. Search terms included: "The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure: A New Scale for Use With Diverse Groups."

[17] It is worth noting again that the *MEIM* is not the only instrument used to measure ethnic identity throughout psychology, nor are its items the sole indicators of how psychology, in general, has conceptualized ethnic identity. Different scholars within psychology do adopt different frameworks and theoretical approaches and there are several other popular measures, such as the *Ethnic Identity Scale.* However, given its spread, the *MEIM* can be thought of as a more "mainstream" measure in the field, and, as such, indicative of a popularly supported framework for understanding ethnic identity.

since been used widely in social psychological research.[18] Despite the prominence of Tajfel's

view of ethnic identity, disciplines across the social sciences have not necessarily agreed on how

to define and measure ethnic identity. Psychology, sociology, and anthropology, to name a few,

have all studied ethnic identity, but have used "a wide range of theoretical approaches and

research methods" (Phinney 157). Beyond disciplinary differences in lenses of analysis, it is no

surprise that there is such variety in how the construct of ethnic identity has been defined and

measured. Definitions of identity are often plagued with myriad problematics that concern how

an individual's subjective identity experience crosscuts with dominant ideologies about what it

means to be a particular person at that moment in time.

Returning to Phinney, she notes that much of the research on ethnic identity, prior to the

creation of the *MEIM*, focused on *specific groups* and attempted to pin-point the key aspects that

made up ethnic identity within them. Across those studies aiming to understand ethnic identity,

researchers have noted what they believe to be different "components" or "aspects of ethnic

identity," including: "self-identification," "language," "social networks," "religious affiliation,"

"endogamy," "positive attitudes," and "many varied cultural traditions and practices" (157). For

Phinney, conducting research on the various elements believed to constitute ethnic identity was

problematic in that it prevented researchers from being able to properly compare and contrast

findings across studies. It was not that these components were necessarily essentialist, but that,

as a result of "the diversity in approaches to measuring ethnic identity and differences among

ethnic groups," (157) these studies could not be in conversation with one another; they could not

put all of the assumed pieces *together*. What would a comparative model that didn't think it had

---

[18] Social psychology is a subset of general psychology, defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as "…the study of how individuals affect and are affected by other people and by their social and physical environments" ("All About Social Psychology"). In terms of what social psychologists study, the APA lists: "interpersonal and group dynamics and social challenges, such as prejudice, implicit bias, bullying, criminal activity and substance abuse…[and] social interactions and the factors that influence them, such as group behavior, attitudes, public perceptions and leadership" ("All About Social Psychology").

to reduce ethnic identity to its integral parts look like? Is it possible to create such a model

without relying on stereotyped views of ethnic subjects?

Interestingly, Phinney did wonder whether the differences across disciplines in studying

ethnic identity raised the question as to whether it was even *possible* to measure and study ethnic

identity "as a general phenomenon with commonalities across groups" or whether "the

uniqueness of each group [made] generalizing impossible" (157). Despite this curiosity, which

serves as an admission that one could locate within our critical side, Phinney was willing to risk

working with a generalized conceptualization of ethnic identity in order to compare findings

across studies. Her reasoning for viewing ethnic identity as a "general phenomenon with

commonalities across groups" lied in that 1) previously held theoretical discussions about ethnic

identity within psychology (from the 70's and 80's) treated it as a such and 2) since the 80's,

cross-cultural psychologists had stressed the "need" to consider both universal and culture-

specific issues when discussing "the problem of generalizing across groups" (158). More

specifically, Phinney, citing a 1964 article by prominent cross-cultural psychologist Donald T.

Campbell, claimed that he "pointed out that cultural differences are interpretable only against a

background of assumed similarities" (158).[19] Such an understanding of "cultural differences,"

however, would imply that culture, and the "assumed similarities" Campbell mentions, are stable

and unchanging, immune to the social and historical shifts that shape cultures.

With regard to the *MEIM*, Phinney aimed to create a measure of ethnic identity that

postulated it as a universal psychological dimension, as "a general phenomenon," that was

relevant across groups (158). This measure could be possible, Phinney posited, because of

certain characteristics believed to be "common to the ethnic identity of all ethnic group

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[19] See: Campbell, "Distinguishing Differences in Perception from Failures of Communication in Cross-Cultural Studies."

members" (158). These alleged components of ethnic identity, cited from a *Psychological Bulletin* review article on ethnic identity written by Phinney in 1990, are "self-identification as a group member," "sense of belonging," and "attitudes towards one's group" (158).

The first "element" of ethnic identity "common to a wide range of ethnic groups" is self-identification, or the "ethnic label that one uses for oneself" (Phinney 158). In the *MEIM*, this aspect of ethnic identity takes the form of an open-ended response question appearing before the main ethnic identity items, prompting participants to fill in a blank: "In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be_____" (172). This open-ended format allows participants to tag themselves using their preferred label (e.g. "Puerto Rican," "Mexican American," "Hispanic," etc.). Recall that on the survey, this fill-in-the blank question is preceded by an instructional paragraph defining ethnicity (see second epigraph).

In addition, following the main set of ethnic identity items, participants are asked to indicate their ethnicity from a close-ended list of 7 ethnicities: (1) Asian, Asian American, or Oriental, (2) Black or African American, (3) Hispanic or Latino, (4) White, Caucasian, European, not Hispanic, (5) American Indian, (6) Mixed; parents are from two different groups, and (7) Other (write in), as well as to indicate what their father's and mother's ethnicities are using the above numbered categories. In differentiating between ethnic identity and ethnicity, Phinney aims to "allow for [the] comparison among subjects of varying ethnicit[ies] (parental background)" and "permit identification of cases where ethnicity and self-identification differ or where individuals of mixed backgrounds identify themselves as members of a single group" (159). The self-label an ethnic participant adopts, she points out, may have differing "psychological and political correlates," and, as such, are useful to assess (159). For example, consider the psychological and political differences that may exist between someone who chooses to self-label as "Chicana" or "Xicana" instead of as "Mexican-American." What do

these labels mean and what could we say about someone who chooses a label like "Xicana" over "Mexican-American"?

Beyond collecting ethnic subjects' self-identification labels, the *MEIM* also assesses "essential elements" of ethnic identity, which, we are told, consist of their ethnic behaviors (2 items), "positive ethnic attitudes" and sense of belonging toward their group (5 items), and their ethnic identity achievement (7 items), which includes "both exploration and resolution of identity issues" (159, 164). When taking the *MEIM*, participants read through a set of items that are meant to capture these elements and then rate how much they "agree or disagree with each statement"; using a 4-point response scale, response options include "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," "somewhat disagree," and "strongly disagree" (164). The "essential elements" of the *MEIM* suggest that, in order to have a "strong" ethnic identity, one must feel good (have "positive" attitudes) about and feel like they belong to their group, perform "ethnic behaviors," and understand the "meaning of their ethnicity."

Immediately, one must wonder why having or lacking these qualities results in identities that are "stronger" or "weaker." From the beginning, the *MEIM* is conceptualized such that, before even exploring how one might experience their ethnic identity, a priori judgments have been made about what an ethnic subject's subjective world and outward display of their "ethnic-ness" *should* look like. What is considered good or bad, strong or weak, is imposed upon the ethnic subject from the outside for purposes of generalizability. The *MEIM* does not seek to understand the complexities of ethnic subjecthood; it quite literally seeks to flatten them, clearing the way for the processes internal to the constitution of stereotypes. Then again, one might wonder whether such complexities could ever be understood without flattening, without paving the way for the codification of stereotypes. Is the correction of the stereotype as much of a construction as the stereotype itself?

In the case of "ethnic behaviors," one must wonder what exactly makes a behavior "ethnic." Phinney, expanding upon this idea, describes these behaviors as ethnic practices "common to most groups," including involvement in social activities with members of one's group and participation in cultural traditions, both of which are measured on the *MEIM*.[20] Specifically, the two items that assess this construct are: "I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group" and "I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs" (173).

Thus, for Phinney, the more socially involved a person is with members of their ethnic group, and the more they participate in the "cultural traditions" of their ethnic group, the *stronger* their ethnic identity is believed to be.[21] Following this logic, to be a "strong" ethnic subject is to engage in rituals and to interact with other subjects similarly deemed ethnic. This view both denies ethnic subjects' agency and lacks any consideration regarding whether a subject has *access* to cultural resources. An ethnic subject may, for myriad reasons, live in an area where they are not surrounded by other members of their ethnic group. Even if they *were* surrounded by other ethnic subjects, however, must one necessarily interact with them? Phinney's view compels one to believe that this is the case; that there are precise ways in which ethnic subjects must relate, must engage with other ethnic subjects to be strong in their "ethnic-ness." What of the ethnic subjects who do not wish to consume Phinney's rice and beans?

Take, for example, the case of the queer ethnic subject who feels excluded by their own community as a result of their queerness. Must this ethnic subject be forced to interact with others who may not accept one aspect of their identity (their "queerness") lest they be stripped of

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[20] Phinney also notes that language usage, "another widely used indicator of ethnic identity," is not measured in the *MEIM* because it has "different salience with various groups (and virtually none for some)" (159).

[21] Though I am interpreting single items from the *MEIM*, it is important to keep in mind that the items belonging to each subscale are averaged together to create a composite score for the construct under question (e.g. ethnic behaviors).

another (their "ethnic-ness")? To add, what of the introverted ethnic subject? Can an ethnic

subject be introverted, or does that quality not fit into the image of "the ethnic"? Is an ethnic

subject allowed to suffer from social anxiety, dislike other members of their ethnic group, work

independently or be *inactive* in "social groups that include mostly members of [their] own ethnic

group"? Do these experiences or additional qualities, then, make a subject "less" ethnic?

Phinney's notions of what constitutes a "weak" or "strong" ethnic identity strips ethnic subjects

of other, intersecting identities and lacks consideration for how these additional identities might

interact with one's ethnic identity. Indeed, it is by tearing ethnic subjects from the very social

and cultural world that produced them and that they helped produced that the stereotyped ethnic

subject is thrust into existence. Antonie Dvorakova, differentiating between cross-cultural and

cultural psychology, reinforces this point:

> [The notion within cultural psychology that culture and psyche are mutually
>
> constitutive] implies that human cognition, emotion, and behavior cannot be
>
> studied independently from the historically based sociocultural contexts in which
>
> people live, because psychological functioning necessarily reflects the
>
> socioculturally specific meanings and practices that are involved in the emergence
>
> of higher order psychological processes.[22]

Affirmation and belonging, considered to be key components of ethnic identity, are also

measured in the *MEIM*. These constructs are operationalized as "ethnic pride," "feeling good

about one's background," being "happy with one's group membership," and "feelings of

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[22] Dvorakova, "The Cultural Psychology Endeavor to Make Culture Central to Psychology: Comment on Hall et al. (2016)," 889.

belonging and attachment to the group" (159).[23,24,25] What does it mean to say that one need have

"pride" or "feel good" about oneself to have a strong ethnic identity? What if, for example, one

suffers from depression and shame as a result of (per Phinney's logic) having a "strong ethnic

identity"? Returning to the example of the queer ethnic subject, what if it is the very act of

interacting with other members of one's ethnic group that results in depression and shame? What

if it is engaging in cultural traditions, in being more recognizably ethnic, that leads one to *not*

feel good about their background?

One cannot minimize the effect discrimination has on an ethnic subjects' affective world.

Many times, discrimination results from simply *being* an ethnic subject. In other cases, an issue

emerges not with being an ethnic subject, but with being seen as lacking in one's "ethnic-ness,"

as not being the "proper" kind of ethnic subject. What, then, does the properly ethnic subject

look like? The *MEIM* is useful in that it illustrates what is believed to be the right kind of ethnic

subject: one who has successfully "achieved" the "right" kind of ethnic identity. The "right" kind

of ethnic identity is one in which ethnic subjects are *happy* to belong to their group and feel *good*

about their background. These subjects must not only feel a sense of belonging, but feel a *strong*

sense of belonging; they must not just have pride, but have *a lot* of pride. The *MEIM*, in

measuring concepts like affirmation and belonging, catalogues other members in one's group as

nothing more than masses of "ethnic-ness," having no additional traits that make them uniquely

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[23] Specifically, the 5 items are: "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to"; "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group"; "I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments"; "I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group"; and "I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background" (Phinney 172-173).

[24] In Kevin Cokley's piece, he discusses how Adriana Umaña-Taylor questioned the notion that one must feel good about their ethnic group identity, leading her to create the *Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS),* yet another survey invested in the notion that ethnic identity can be measured.

[25] Phinney points out that other measures have included negative ethnic attitudes, "such as wanting to hide or change one's ethnicity," but preliminary studies indicated that there is little variance in how participants respond to the negative items. These items were not included in the *MEIM* because they "have too strong a social desirability component or imply too intense a personal rejection for the responses to be well distributed" (160).

human and that complicate social relationships between different ethnic subjects. The "right"

kind of ethnic subject is the one who is happy and feels good about their background, regardless,

it seems, of what they may or may not have experienced in relation to their ethnic identity.

Citing Erik Erikson, Phinney also brings the notion of "identity achievement" to the

MEIM, or the "secure sense of self" that is viewed as "the optimal outcome of the identity

formation process" (160). In the case of *ethnic* identity achievement, the formation of one's

ethnic identity is viewed as necessitating exploration of "the meaning of one's ethnicity (e.g. its

history and traditions)" that then leads to "a secure sense of oneself as a member of a minority

group" (160). In Phinney's measurement, ethnic identity achievement ranges from "lack of

exploration and commitment (low interest and awareness and little clarity concerning one's

ethnicity)" to "evidence of both exploration and commitment, reflected in efforts to learn more

about one's background and a clear understanding of the role of ethnicity for oneself" (161).

Scoring low on this measure is indicative of "ethnic identity diffusion," whereas a high score

represents "ethnic identity achievement."[26]

The items measuring the exploration and commitment component of ethnic identity

achievement are: "I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as

its history, traditions, and customs"; "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it

means for me"; "I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group

membership"; "I am not very clear about the role of my ethnicity in my life" (reverse-scored); "I

really have not spent much time trying to learn more about the culture and history of my ethnic

group" (reverse-scored); "I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to

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[26] Identity diffusion, as conceptualized by Erik Erikson, is a "lack of clarity about oneself and one's place in society" (Phinney 160).

me, in terms of how to relate to my own group and other groups"; and "In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group" (172).[27]

Readers here should take a moment to consider what it means to "achieve" the formation of one's ethnic identity. For an ethnic identity to be successfully formed, to be achieved, requires that there be something in mind that serves as an endpoint indicating achievement. On that path is supposedly exploration; one must explore one's history and traditions. The questions of access to and what counts as cultural knowledge, however, are not made clear or even realized as relevant to a measure trying to determine the degree to which an ethnic subject engages in these activities. Are those who lack access to information about the history and traditions of their group (perhaps *as a result of* the very historical conditions that have shaped their group's experiences) incapable of developing their own meaning about what it means to be an ethnic subject in the world? Furthermore, what counts as "cultural knowledge"? Can cultural knowledge not be developed by simply existing as a subject marked as ethnic, as "other," in the eyes of the dominant group or class?

Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of mestiza consciousness in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, for example, disrupts notions of stable and distinct "cultural knowledges," going so far as to suggest that the very experiences that place one outside of preexisting categories can serve as bases for a new type of consciousness and subject:

> As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are
> mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have
> no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer

---

[27] Reverse scored items are items which are framed opposite to what they measure. When performing a statistical analysis, the opposing number is entered. For instance, if a participant responds to "I am not very clear about the role of my ethnicity in my life" with a 1 ("strongly disagree"), the 1 is changed to a 4 ("strongly agree") to suggest the participant feels that they are "very clear about the role of [their] ethnicity in [their] life." This is done so that, statistically, several items representing a similar construct can be averaged together.

of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the

collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos;

yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture,

a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system

with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un*

amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has

produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature

that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.[28]

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics,* José Esteban

Muñoz, inspired by Chicana theorists like Gloria Anzaldúa, uses the term *identities-in-difference*

for those identities that "locate the enacting of the self at precisely the point where the discourses

of essentialism and constructivism short-circuit" (6). These identities-in-difference, Muñoz

specifies, emerge from "a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere" that is

predicated on a subject's "ability to disidentify with the mass public" (7). Calling on a

psychoanalytic account of identification, he makes clear that what stops identification from

happening "is always the ideological restrictions implicit in an identificatory site" (7). To

Muñoz, mestizaje and queerness exemplify the kind of identity markers that "defy notions of

uniform identity or origins" (31). These are fragmented disidentities that cannot be fully captured

or understood, but that exist in opposition to, while also emerging from, "state and global power

apparatuses that employ systems of racial, sexual, and national subjugation" (161).

With the kind of mestiza consciousness and identities-in-difference proposed by

Anzaldúa and Muñoz in mind, one might see the precariousness in psychology's investment with

the development of "clear" and "secure" ethnic identity. To reach "ethnic identity achievement"

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[28] Anzaldúa, "La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness, 80-81.

is, accordingly, to develop a secure sense of oneself; however, what does it mean to be "secure" in one's understanding of what their ethnic identity means to them? If, for example, one considers that identities are shaped by the social and the historical climate, and those aspects of reality are constantly in motion, can one truly develop a "secure" sense of themselves? If subjects are inscribed in a structure of language that is riddled with gaps, and subjects come to understand themselves through a process of meaning-making that is inherently lacking because of such a structure, is it possible for these subjects to develop a secure sense of who they are?[29] Furthermore, why even consider the categories of "secure" and "clear" as adjudicators for understanding (or not understanding) the self?

The measures of ethnic identity, while seemingly unbiased, are loaded with meaning about what ethnic subjects should and should not do to be considered "strong" ethnic subjects. If it is the case that to "achieve" one's ethnic identity, one must explore, who is to say what that exploration should consist of or look like? One may think about how their life will be affected by their ethnic group membership, but why is it something that one must think "a lot" about? Does it not matter *how* or *why* ethnic subjects think about their ethnic identity in a particular way? Researchers aiming to understand ethnic identity do not seem to consider what they are testing for as being precisely the kind of historically situated, introjected notions for what constitutes proper and improper ethnic subjectivity. In other words, they do not place themselves within the historical moment in which they work or consider the ways in which they operationalize ethnic identity as snapshots of the very racism they hope to measure and ameliorate, but rather, as above and outside of it, as if looking down from a bird's-eye view.

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[29] In the introduction to this thesis, I briefly described the Lacanian notion of the split subject, which I am again referencing here.

In creating these survey items on ethnic identity, researchers are limiting the degree to which they can come to understand how different ethnic subjects view their ethnic identity. When subjects are forced to adhere to the categories of and meanings made by researchers, and select a response to items without the opportunity to explain or elaborate upon them, much of the richness with regard to how ethnic subjects define and experience their "ethnic-ness" falls out the sides. It is no wonder that qualitative research on ethnic identity reveals a world of greater complexity than quantitative methods; something is always lost in the numbers.[30] In the case of the *MEIM*, however, it appears that the point was to lose that very something.

Measuring Degrees of Recognizable *Ethnic-ness*

> *The assumption that data are objective, without an understanding of the hermeneutic surplus that goes into the construction and interpretation of data, has, for instance, led to epistemological violence against a variety of groups in the history of psychology.*
> —Thomas Teo, "Theoretical Psychology: A Critical-Philosophical Outline of Core Issues"

As is common in any kind of research, when a measurement tool like the *MEIM* has been determined, statistically, to be reliable and valid enough, researchers aiming to further understand the construct or phenomenon under measure (i.e., "ethnic identity") will design studies that make use of the *MEIM*.[31] Again, since its conception 20 years ago, the *MEIM* has led to a proliferation of research on ethnic and racial identity.[32] Given that the *MEIM* understands and depicts ethnic identity in a particular way, it follows that many, if not most, of the studies that have used the *MEIM* in the past 20 years have operated under a similar or the same

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[30] This does not mean, however, that quantitative research isn't useful—one could easily argue that something is always lost in language as well. What I am trying to get at here, rather, is that it is difficult to capture the multiple layers of ethnic identity because of the fixed operationalizations needed for quantitative analysis. In the next chapter, I will address the "quantitative vs. qualitative" debate.

[31] In statistics, a measure is said to be "valid" if it measures what it's supposed to measure (which is often determined by examining its relationship to other, similar constructs) and "reliable" if it consistently yields similar/the same results each time it is taken.

[32] See: Rivas-Drake, Seaton, Markstrom, Quintana, Syed, Lee…and Yip, "Ethnic and Racial Identity in Adolescence: Implications for Psychosocial, Academic, and Health Outcomes."

conceptualization of ethnic identity. Thus, studies aiming to measure ethnic identity may be perpetuating rigid and limited theorizations about what it means to be an ethnic subject in the world instead of expanding our understanding of ethnic identity development.[33] With that said, it is worth noting that I do not believe that there is an ethnic identity that is "complete." Rather, the point I am trying to make is that studies using the *MEIM* are already limiting their participants— and the ways in which they might conceptualize their own ethnic identity—before the study even begins.

One way some researchers attempt to ameliorate the issue of imposing a particular understanding of ethnic identity on participants is by allowing them to self-label and describe, qualitatively, what they believe and understand about their ethnic identity. Interestingly, researchers have noted that using qualitative research in this area has yielded significantly different findings compared to quantitative work.[34] Some scholars have also noted that studies aiming to measure ethnic identity "have not captured the meanings youth ascribe to different ethnic labels," and, instead, have led to researchers "[relying] on their own ethnic label definitions to interpret the significance of ethnic self-labeling patterns" (Zarate, Bhimji, and Reese 96). To reiterate, the issue with this interpretation pattern lies in the fact that it does not allow participants to organically produce their own ethnic label and describe the components *they* feel constitute their chosen ethnic label. When researchers do not ask participants what their ethnic labels mean to them, but instead rely on participants' responses to a select number of items on predetermined ethnic identity components, they are limiting their understanding of their participants' beliefs about their ethnic identity and reducing them to essentialist components.

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[33] For the sake of being able to compare and contrast studies, as Phinney pointed out in her 1992 article.
[34] See: Benner, and Graham, "Latino Adolescents' Experiences of Discrimination Across the First 2 Years of High School: Correlates and Influences on Educational Outcomes."

In the next half of this chapter, I will focus on tracing how three studies—some directly using the *MEIM* and others relying on self-labeling based on the *MEIM*—interpret findings relating to ethnic identity.[35] In addition to outlining the researchers' interpretations of their findings, I will also provide alternative readings based on a critical interpretation of the *MEIM* (or specific quantitative items, as appropriate). My hope is that each of the subsequent studies adds something unique to our understanding of how studies construct and replicate oversimplified understandings of ethnic identity.

Study 1

The first article, "Discrimination, Ethnic Identity, and Academic Outcomes of Mexican Immigrant Children: The Importance of School Context" was published in *Child Development* (a top developmental psychology journal) in 2012 and authored by Christia Spears Brown and Hui Chu. The study focused on a sample of 204 first- and second-generation Mexican immigrant children (mean age of 9 years) living in a predominantly White community. Brown and Chu examined these students' ethnic identity, perceptions of discrimination, and academic attitudes and performance. They also examined schools' promotion of multiculturalism via their coding of diverse imagery and teachers' attitudes about the value of diversity "in predicting immigrant youth's attitudes and experiences" (1477).

This article did not use the full *MEIM* to directly measure ethnic identity, but rather, allowed children to select their own ethnic identity label after being read a paragraph describing ethnicity. After providing their own label, the child participants rated their agreement with five items assessing the "positive affect associated with their ethnicity" and "the importance of their ethnic group to their self-concept" (Brown and Chu 1479). While the authors did not indicate the

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[35] These studies were selected because each of them consider an "internal" attribute—one's ethnic identity—together with discrimination, an "external" experience. All three of these studies are what one might call typical, everyday research studies (as opposed to groundbreaking ones) found in popular journals.

contents of all five items, they did provide a sample of each: for positive affect, "I am happy to be [ethnicity]," and for importance to self-concept, "I feel that being [ethnicity] is a big part of who I am" (1479). The item scale ranged from 1, indicating students felt the statements were "not at all true" of them, to 4, indicating students felt the statements were "very true" of them. Higher scores were interpreted as indicating "a more positive and important ethnic identity" (1479).

Worth noting is that the paragraph Brown and Chu read to the children describing ethnicity before their self-label was never included in the study. The authors noted, however, that the paragraph was based on one used by Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin, in one article, and Pfeifer, Ruble, Bachman, Alvarez, Cameron, and Fuligni, in another.[36] Tracing back to these articles, one finds that the paragraph read to the children describing ethnicity comes from Phinney's *MEIM*. Specifically, in the Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin article entitled "Variability in the Inter-Group Attitudes of White Children: What We Can Learn from Their Ethnic Identity Labels," the authors explicitly state:

> Based on Phinney's (1992) multigroup ethnic identity measure (*MEIM*), children were asked to provide a self-label of their ethnicity. They read the following paragraph:
>
> > In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American,

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[36] See: Pfeifer, Ruble, Bachman, Alvarez, Cameron, and Fuligni, "Social Identities and Intergroup Bias in Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Children," and Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin, "Variability in the Intergroup Attitudes of White Children: What We Can Learn from Their Ethnic Identity Labels."

Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions

are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or

react to it.

Children then responded to the question, 'In terms of my ethnic group, I consider

myself to be ___.'[37]

This version of the ethnicity paragraph found in the Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin study is

slightly different from the original paragraph in Phinney's 1992 article on the *MEIM* (see second

epigraph in this chapter for the original).[38] Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin appear to have used an

updated version of this ethnicity definition paragraph, also created by Phinney, which can easily

be found via a Google search of the *MEIM* (see Appendix).

While Brown and Chu refer to Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin when citing the paragraph on

ethnicity read to the children, it is curious that they did not directly include the paragraph in the

current article. Following the paragraph description of ethnicity and towards the end of the

revised *MEIM*, participants are prompted to select their ethnicity from a list of 7 options (which

are slightly different from the ones listed in the original, 1992 version).[39] However, in Brown and

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[37] Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin, "Variability in the Intergroup Attitudes of White Children: What We Can Learn from Their Ethnic Identity Labels," 762-763.

[38] In fact, this version is more closely related to the revised *MEIM*, introduced in a 1999 study entitled "The Structure of Ethnic Identity of Young Adolescents from Diverse Ethnocultural Groups" by Robert E. Roberts, Jean S. Phinney, and others. Even the revised version, however, is slightly different from the one presented in the Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin study. In fact, the exact version used by Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin can be found following a simple Google search using the terms "phinney meim." The first link leads to a Word document entitled "The *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure* (*MEIM*)" located in the California State University, Los Angeles website that includes information on the *MEIM*, Jean S. Phinney's contact information, and a ready-to-use *MEIM* survey including the exact paragraph used by Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin (Phinney "The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)," see Appendix). While it is not completely clear whether Brown and Chu used this exact version of the paragraph on ethnicity (as they did not include the exact paragraph they read to the children), it is highly likely that the same paragraph was used given that Christia Spears Brown authored both papers.

[39] The newer version reads: "My ethnicity is: (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others; (2) Black or African American; (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others; (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic; (5) American Indian/Native American; (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups; (7) Other (write in): _____." (Phinney, "The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)").

Chu's study, it seems that this list of ethnicities was not provided to the young participants. Rather, Brown and Chu asked participants to provide a self-label.

In asking for a self-label, it may be that Brown and Chu wanted to avoid limiting participants to a set of ethnicity categories as the *MEIM* does (even with its inclusion of the "Other" option). Instead, allowing participants to state their own ethnicity without having to select one from a premade list provides students, at first glance, more freedom with regard to how they may choose to identify. Following participants' responses to subsequent items, researchers can then gain insight as to how students think and feel about their chosen ethnic label, instead of one they might not normally identify with. However, given that the researchers read a paragraph listing off different ethnicity labels, it is possible that the students limited themselves to the labels they heard coming from authority figures (in other words, providing sample labels may have increased susceptibility to response bias or other demand characteristics and thus undermined the effect of self-labeling).[40] One must wonder how much freedom the self-labeling method provided above and beyond a traditional list of ethnic labels. What agency do children have to select labels other than the ones listed to them given the context of the study and the presence of the researchers (authority figures)? To what extent does being read a paragraph already defining ethnicity and listing off a sample of labels limit children in what they can select (or express with regard to what they currently understand about ethnic identity)? Are they really "self-labeling"? In this case, self-labeling without the printed list is much like a forced "Other"

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[40] A "response bias" is "a systematic tendency to respond to a range of questionnaire items on some basis other than the specific item content (i.e., what the items were designed to measure)" (Paulhus 17). Demand characteristics are "cues which govern [a participant's] perception—which communicate what is expected of him and what the experimenter hopes to find…[t]hey include the scuttlebutt about the experiment, its setting, implicit and explicit instructions, the person of the experimenter, subtle cues provided by him, and, of particular importance, the experimental procedure itself. All of these cues are interpreted in the light of the subject's past learning and experience. Although the explicit instructions are important, it appears that subtler cues from which the subject can draw covert or even unconscious inference may be still more powerful" (Orne 112).

category. Regardless of the perceived freedom in choosing, most students may feel compelled to stick to one of the options read to them by the researchers.

In asking students to select an ethnic label, one also has to wonder what difference lies in "ethnicity" versus "ethnic identity." Are these two constructs conflated? Under the "Measures" section of their paper, Brown and Chu include a subsection entitled "*Ethnic Identity*." Here, they explain that participants were prompted to self-label their ethnicity, and then asked to rate the positive affect associated with that ethnicity and its importance to their self-concept. Positive affect and importance to self-concept are both named by Phinney as components of ethnic identity. Thus, it seems that for these researchers, the feelings associated with one's ethnicity and its importance to a person are the components that constitute ethnic identity (at least for the purposes of quantitative assessment).

Turning to the results of the study, it is important to keep in mind how each construct was assessed in the study as the findings are presented. Specifically, in the case of ethnic identity, recall that ethnic identity was comprised of participants' "self-labels" of their ethnicity, their ratings regarding the positive affect they have associated with their ethnicity, and the degree to which they felt their ethnicity was important to their self-concept. Breaking down this study's findings by school composition reveals that students who went to White and moderately diverse schools, who felt less positive affect around their ethnicity and felt like it was less important to their self-concept, and who experienced teacher discrimination, had more negative academic attitudes.[41]

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[41] With regard to academic attitudes, students in this study were asked "about the importance of academic success (e.g., 'It is important that I do well in school'), the immediate and future utility of school (e.g., 'Doing well in school is the best way for me to do well in life'), their enjoyment of school (e.g., 'Do you find doing school work interesting?') and their academic self-efficacy (e.g., 'How good are you at school in general?'). Students responded to 18 items, with scores ranging from 1 (*not at all true* or *not much*) to 4 (*very true* or *very much*)" (Brown and Chu 1480). Teacher discrimination was measured using five items asking students "how often they experienced differential treatment from their teachers in the classroom (e.g., 'How often do you get graded unfairly because you are [ethnicity]?')" (Brown and Chu 1479-1480).

Furthermore, students at predominantly White and moderately diverse schools who had a "strong, positive ethnic identity" felt more like they belonged at their school than students in the predominantly Latino school. Students at the White and moderately diverse schools who experienced teacher discrimination and had "less positive ethnic identities" felt less like they belonged at their school (that relationship disappeared and "ethnic identity" became unrelated to school belonging when students at these schools had "very positive ethnic identities"). Only at the predominantly White schools was a "strong, positive ethnic identity" associated with greater academic performance.

Interestingly, the researchers found that, after controlling for socioeconomic status, students attending predominantly Latino schools perceived the most peer, teacher, and community discrimination compared to students at White and moderately diverse schools.[42] However, despite their perceiving more peer and teacher discrimination, students at predominantly Latino schools did not seem to develop more negative academic attitudes or feel like they did not belong compared to those at White and moderately diverse schools (who had "less positive ethnic identities"). In fact, students at predominantly Latino schools who had "positive ethnic identities" and who perceived more peer discrimination felt like they belonged *more.*

In discussing their findings, Brown and Chu suggest that more research needs to be done to determine whether ethnic minority children attending predominantly Latino schools perceive more discrimination than those who attend predominantly White or moderately diverse schools as a result of "more intergroup behavior (i.e., more "actual discrimination")" or "a greater

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[42] To "control for" socioeconomic status here "refers to the technique of separating out the effect of one independent variable [in this case socioeconomic status] from the effect of the remaining variables on the dependent variable[s] [in this case peer, teacher, and community discrimination] in a multivariate analysis" (Gschwend 1). Per Gschwend, controlling for variables is "of utmost importance for making valid inferences in a statistical analysis because one has to hold other variables constant in order to establish that a specific effect is due to one particular independent variable" (1).

sensitivity to discrimination" (1483). Moreover, they note that the finding that children at

predominantly Latino schools who perceived more discrimination but whose academic attitudes

were not impacted by it is consistent with "person-context fit models" (1484). Such models

argue that consonance between the individual and social context can abate negative outcomes.

Thus, to Brown and Chu, there are fewer detrimental implications of perceived negative

treatment by ethnicity if such negative treatment has been normalized in particular schools.[43] In

support of this explanation, Brown and Chu also note their finding that, at predominantly White

and moderately diverse schools, perceived peer discrimination was associated with lower

feelings of belonging for students regardless of ethnic identity (and for students with a "weaker

ethnic identity" at the predominantly Latino schools).

Here, I return again to Phinney and her belief in ethnic identity "strength." In these terms,

"strength" connotes that there exists a particular way of being an ethnic subject that can be

thought of as "weak" or "strong," less or more, worse or better. To have a "strong" ethnic

identity, according to these researchers, is to feel good about one's ethnicity and to find it

important to who one is as a person. Implicit in these delineations is that there is a certain way of

being ethnic that is preferable, or that there is a particular kind of ethnic subject that is

desirable—one that *feels good* about being ethnic and who thinks of being ethnic *as important* to

their self-concept. Phinney and the researchers who construct a particular set of guidelines to

determine ethnic identity strength, then, are constructing an image of what the "right" ethnic

subject should look like. As researchers aiming to promote "positive and important ethnic

identities," they are essentially aiming to coerce ethnic subjects into mimicking that which is

"recognizably ethnic" (Chow "Keeping Them" 107).

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[43] Brown and Chu close by noting that their findings are correlational and cross-sectional, and thus do not imply causality. Whether or not causality can be inferred, the ways in which they conceptualize ethnic identity and interpret their findings remain relevant and interesting to this discussion.

One of the issues with how researchers have conceptualized ethnic identity here lies in the direct association between *happy* (as in "happy to be ethnicity") and *positive.* While happiness is often considered to be a "positive" thing, the way in which it may be "positive" can vary. That is, while being happy to be a particular ethnicity might feel good, and in that sense, be "positive," it is also possible for sadness and anger be considered "positive." Depending on the person, sadness or anger can be thought of as symptoms indicating that something is not right. Anxiety, anger, sadness, and other non-happy emotions may signal to a member of a marginalized group that their treatment and conditions within society are, for example, unjust.[44] When one belongs to a group that is actively devalued by the dominant classes and institutions in our society, anger and sadness can be motivating, indicative of the need to act and, in that way, may be thought of as "positive." While it is possible that anger and sadness can also be paralyzing, and while it is possible that those who feel good about their ethnicity can also act to propel social change, it is worth considering how and why different ethnic subjects might think of their identity differently. To not be happy to be one's ethnicity is not immediately a bad thing. Researchers must consider the reasons *why* an ethnic subject might not be happy to be their ethnicity and what effect that unhappiness has on the subject before suggesting that they do not have a "positive" or "strong" ethnic identity. To not feel good about one's identity in a society that actively devalues it is not pathological or necessarily wrong; rather, it is a response, a recognition, that something is not right and must be changed.[45] In other words, feeling happy in the face of discrimination does little to solve issues like racism; negative affect and anger are both sensible responses to being discriminated against as well as motivators for social change.

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[44] I recognize that this may not be the case for all ethnic subjects in society. For example, one's socioeconomic status, immigration status, and skin color (to name a few) also play a role in shaping how one might experience their ethnic identity.

[45] That which is not right and ought to be changed is referring to systemic racism and discrimination, those things which are external to ethnic subjects and impact how they live and think of themselves in their day-to-day lives.

Turning now to the importance of ethnic identity to self-concept, could it not be that an ethnic subject finds their ethnic identity important to them *because* it has functioned as a source of negativity in their life? When I say this, I do not mean to suggest that one disassociate themselves from their ethnic identity or that one aim to eliminate their relationship to their ethnic identity as a solution (I will discuss internalized racism in more detail later). Rather, I am suggesting that if an aspect of who one is as a person is constantly targeted and devalued, it will gain salience to a person and, thus, importance. Importance does not necessarily mean good or bad, but that something in one's life has gained prominence and has become associated with certain emotions. Researchers might want to consider the ways in which or the reasons why one's ethnic identity is thought of as important to their self-concept. Specifically, it may be worth considering how differing relationships to one's emotions regarding their ethnic identity might serve different purposes.

In addition to experiencing discrimination in society, what sort of impact does being told one does not have the right kind of ethnic identity (i.e., a "strong" ethnic identity) have on an ethnic subject? When researchers use quantitative methods to measure participants' ethnic identities, they are not collecting information about what the participants understand as constituting ethnic identity or about why they might think or feel about their ethnic identity in the ways they do. Instead, they are trying to make sense of these participants' experiences in ways that are limited to the meaning attributed to preexisting boxes. Do these constructions of ethnic identity (in terms of the essentialist components that make them up and the ways in which results based on them are interpreted) have the potential to reproduce the very problems these researchers aim to ameliorate? While researchers cannot necessarily know exactly what sorts of messages participants have received throughout their lives about what it *means* to be an ethnic subject in the world before coming into the study, one would hope that the very researchers

aiming to understand these constructs avoided perpetuating specific messages about what makes for a more desirable or "strong" ethnic identity. The question, it seems, is whether this is even avoidable when using quantitative research methods.

Study 2

The next study, entitled "The Role of Racial Discrimination in the Economic Value of Education Among Urban, Low-Income Latina/o Youth: Ethnic Identity and Gender as Moderators" was published in 2015 in the *American Journal of Community Psychology* by Alison L. Mroczkowski and Bernadette Sánchez. Using resilience theory, this study explored "relationships among perceived racial discrimination, ethnic identity, gender, and economic value of education (EVE)" during Latino/a students' first two years of high school (1).[46] Mroczkowski and Sánchez identify racial discrimination as a "risk factor" related to the "poorer academic performance and educational attainment" of Latino/a youth in addition to the development of negative perceptions of the EVE (2).[47]

Pointing out that some Latino/a students who experience racial discrimination do not do poorly in school, however, the authors aimed to identify "protective factors" that could "buffer the negative effects of racial discrimination on academic outcomes" (2). Given that several studies had found relationships between ethnic identity and academic success, the authors chose to examine ethnic identity as a protective factor. They also examined gender as a moderating

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[46] Resilience theory is based off the notion that some adolescents, despite being faced with risk, "manage to overcome barriers and experience healthy development trajectories, while others do not and experience negative outcomes" (Mroczkowski and Sánchez 1-2). It provides a framework "for understanding the process of overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure," and it "emphasizes promotive factors that either lead to a positive outcome or attenuate a negative outcome" (Mroczkowski and Sánchez 2).

[47] EVE is "the belief that working hard and succeeding in school will lead to better employment and economic opportunities in the future" (2). The authors outline two components of EVE: "First, there are abstract attitudes toward education, which is rooted in the Protestant work ethic ideology that suggests one can increase upward social and economic mobility through education. Second, there are concrete attitudes toward education, which reflect the lived experiences of individuals with regard to the opportunity structure and the payoff of education" (2).

variable.[48] Using the *MEIM* to measure ethnic identity in "urban, low income Latino/a high

school students," they hypothesized that ethnic identity would serve as a protective factor,

buffering the negative effects that racial discrimination may have on Latina/o students' EVE

(1).[49,50]

Following their analyses, the researchers found that among participants, experiencing

racial discrimination in 9th grade predicted lower EVE in 10th grade (both in terms of abstract and

concrete attitudes). When taking into consideration gender differences, however, they noted that

the results were significant for male students only. In interpreting this finding, the authors

suggested that Latino males' observations of "the limited opportunities for men in their

communities" make them "more vulnerable to the negative effects of discrimination on both

their abstract and concrete attitudes toward education" (8).

With regard to ethnic identity, results indicated that for all participants, ethnic identity in

9th grade "showed a significant positive relation to abstract attitudes (i.e., perceived economic

benefits of an education) in 10th grade" (8). The relationship between ethnic identity and concrete

attitudes, however, was only significant for male students such that ethnic identity measured in

9th grade was negatively related with concrete attitudes ("perceived economic limitations of

education") in 10th grade (8). The researchers suggested that, with respect to the EVE, male

students with "a strong ethnic identity" were "more aware of the limited opportunity structure in

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[48] A moderating variable is a variable that is believed to influence the strength of the relationship between two other variables. While the authors examined gender as a moderating variable, the role of gender and its intersection with ethnic identity will not be covered extensively in this chapter.

[49] The majority of the sample ($n = 396$, 88.79%) used in this study was of Mexican descent.

[50] The EVE was measured using the *Benefits and Limitations of Education Scale* (Murdock et al. 2000 as cited in Mroczkowski & Sánchez 2015) which contains two subscales: The *Benefits of Education Subscale* (5 items), which measures abstract attitudes, and the *Limitations of Education Subscale* (10 items), which measures concrete attitudes. Using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*agree very much*) to 5 (*disagree very much*), participants rated the degree to which they agreed with statements such as "If I do well in school, I will get a good job" (sample item from the *Benefits of Education Subscale*) and "I probably won't get paid what I deserve even if I have a great school record" (sample item from the *Limitations of Education Subscale*) (5).

US society for Latino men" (8). Thus, they assert, a "stronger" ethnic identity "served as a protective factor" in that it buffered male participants' abstract attitudes from "the negative effects of racial discrimination" and prevented the development of "overly pessimistic concrete attitudes" toward education (9).

While this study did at times recognize how Latino/a students' attitudes might be "reflective of…perceptions of the opportunity structure" and the lived realities of group members, it is peculiar that the aim of this study was to buffer the impact racial discrimination had on students' *perceptions of the EVE.* Again, EVE is the belief that "working hard and succeeding in school will lead to better employment and economic opportunities in the future," reminiscent of the myth of meritocracy (2). If the opportunity structure leans in favor of privileged students, and low-income Latino/a students are noticing a discrepancy between the idea that "one can increase upward social and economic mobility through education" ("abstract attitudes toward education") and their "lived experiences…with regard to the opportunity structure and the payoff of education" ("concrete attitudes toward education"), why is it that the aim of these researchers is to *prevent* "declines in favorable abstract attitudes" and "increases in pessimistic concrete attitudes" (2, 9)?[51]

Throwing ethnic identity into the mix as a protective factor suggests that there is hope that one's "ethnic-ness" contains something within it preventing one from perceiving education as having less economic value when faced with racial discrimination. In other words, despite the lived experiences of these students, this research articulates its goal in a way that suggests it is

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[51] By "privileged" students I mean students who come from wealthier backgrounds and have more resources (e.g. money, connections, social capital, etc.) and thus, more privilege. This obviously falls on a continuum—middle-income students are financially better off than low-income students and upper-income students are better off financially than both middle- and lower-income students. White students can also, for example, be privileged in this context in that, because of their skin color *specifically,* they do not need to worry about the impact of racial/ethnic discrimination on their educational outcomes specifically. Furthermore, race and income are also strongly linked (See: Kochhar and Fry, "Wealth Inequality Has Widened Along Racial, Ethnic Lines Since End of Great Recession."; Mullainathan, "Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions").

more concerned with students' ideological adherence to the notion that hard work pays off than with validating the realities low-income Latino/a students face. This approach could be causing more harm than good, particularly if it continues to perpetuate a myth that does not align with what Latino/a students notice about the opportunity structure. After all, believing that hard work leads to greater economic opportunities does little to stop employers from partaking in discriminatory hiring practices based on having a "Latino-sounding" name, for example.[52]

Given that we do not live in a post-racial United States, researchers should think about approaches for improving low-income Latino/a students' educational attitudes that do not rely on the misleading notion that hard work necessarily pays off economically. This idea is too often disrupted by the economic hardships that so many Latina/o students continue to face despite having worked hard and succeeded in their education. If researchers are concerned that students will not work hard and do well in school without the belief that it leads to greater economic opportunity, perhaps it may be beneficial to reframe the story. While education may not necessarily have the same economic value for members belonging to different groups, students may still feel motivated to do well if teachers and schools acknowledge that the current system *is* unfair. Education can provide the kind of social capital and power needed to disrupt a broken system and push for social justice.

Returning to the notion of ethnic identity as a protective factor, it may be useful to consider what it would look like to implement this study's findings/suggestions. Given their finding that ethnic identity serves as a protective factor between racial discrimination and Latino/a students' perceptions of the EVE, Mroczkowski and Sánchez concluded their paper by

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[52] Here, I am referring to studies that have identified racial and ethnic bias in hiring practices (where, for example employers have not called back equally-qualified job candidates with Latino or Black sounding names on their résumés over candidates with White sounding names). See, for example: Matthews, "He Dropped One Letter In His Name While Applying For Jobs, And The Responses Rolled In"; Luo, "'Whitening' the Résumé"; and Howard, "New Study Confirms Depressing Truth About Names And Racial Bias."

stating that "[their] results…provide support for interventions that promote ethnic identity among urban, low-income Latina/o youth" (10). What exactly do interventions that "promote" ethnic identity look like? If ethnic identity is something that can be "promoted," then what these researchers are suggesting is that there is a particular way of being an ethnic subject that can be actively taught, that there are distinguishable, recognizable elements of ethnic identity that can be brought about and planted into those who are marked as ethnic. Furthermore, in suggesting that ethnic identity can be promoted among "Latina/o youth," Mroczkowski and Sánchez imply that ethnic identity is experienced in the same way for all Latina/os. The participants in their study were predominantly Mexican, and it is important to remember that "Latina/o" is a group that encompasses people from a variety of nationalities. Latina/os do not all share the same histories or immigration statuses, nor do all look the same, which can impact how they are coded by others and, as a result, how they are treated, how they experience their ethnic and racial identities.[53] Thus, ethnic identity cannot be "promoted" without being reduced to promotable features, or features that are recognizably "ethnic."

Study 3

The last study under the microscope, "Internalized Racism, Perceived Racism, and Ethnic Identity: Exploring Their Relationship in Latina/o Undergraduates," was published in the *Journal of College Counseling* in 2016 by Carlos P. Hipolito-Delgado. Citing Phinney, Hipolito-Delgado notes that ethnic identity "describes the degree to which an individual understands and associates with his or her ethnic heritage," and, for Latina/os in particular, he describes ethnic identity development as "the process of changing from a limited understanding of or a negative

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[53] I do not mean to imply that there is a particular way of being ethnic that depends on one's nationality, but rather, that the historical and social context for members of differing nationalities varies widely. How one experiences what it means to be an ethnic subject depends greatly on one's experiences and how those experiences intersect with other identity features and characteristics.

association with one's Latina/o heritage to a position of embracing Latina/o ethnicity as an asset"

(98). Those who have a "limited understanding of or a negative association" with their Latina/o

heritage, or who depict their ethnicity as inferior, are said to suffer from "internalized racism"

and may, for example, feel "less intellectually capable because of [their] Latina[/o] ethnicity"

(99). Hipolito-Delgado points out that, according to the *People of Color Identity Model*, one of

the "primary goal[s] of identity development [for] people of color" is to "overcome internalized

racism" (99).[54] Several research studies have found that internalized racism negatively correlates

with mental and physical health and "adversely affect[s] educational achievement" (99).[55] In

addition, perceived racism, or "the subjective experience of racial or ethnic prejudice or

discrimination" has been linked to numerous negative outcomes for people of color. Asserting

that "no research exists examining the relationship between perceived racism and ethnic identity

in Latinas/os," or how that relationship might differ by generational status, Hipolito-Delgado

thus aimed to examine whether internalized and perceived racism were related to the ethnic

identity development of U.S.-born Latina/o undergraduate students (100).[56] He believes that, in

order to "encourage…healthy development," college counselors and student affairs professionals

should "be informed of the conditions that promote or hinder the ethnic identity development of

Latina/o students" (100). I will revisit this notion of "promoting" ethnic identity development

shortly.

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[54] For more information on Helms's *People of Color Identity Model*, see: Helms, "An Update of Helms's White and People of Color Racial Identity Models."

[55] A negative correlation means that, as scores on one variable increase, scores on another decrease (whereas a positive correlation indicates that as scores on one variable increase, scores on another increase). Thus, in the case of internalized racism being negatively correlated with mental and physical health, one would interpret that to mean that, on average, as one's scores on measures of internalized racism increase, their scores on measures of mental and physical health decrease (and vice versa).

[56] The sample size for this study was 373. Most participants (93.6%) came from 4-year institutions, identified as women (69.2%), and considered themselves to be first generation, U.S.-born Latina/os (60.1%). Furthermore, participants "ranged in age from 18 to 45 years ($M = 20.83$, SD $= 2.83$)" (101). It is worth noting that Hipolito-Delgado did not provide information on participants' nationalities—all were considered to fall under the "U.S.-born Latina/o" category.

Hipolito-Delgado used the original version of the *MEIM* to assess ethnic identity as a composite score, such that *lower* mean scores represented "higher levels of ethnic identity development" (102).[57] To measure internalized racism, he used the *Mochihua Tepehuani Scale,* in which participants rated their level agreement (from 1, *strongly agree,* to 7, *strongly disagree*) with 25 stereotypes of Latina/os (e.g. "The high percentage of Latinas/os in jail reflects inborn tendencies toward criminality") (102).[58] Perceived racism was assessed using a modified version of the *Everyday Perceived Racial Discrimination Index* (*EPRI*), which consisted of items such as: "Because of your ethnicity/race people act as if they are afraid of you" and "Because of your ethnicity/race you are called names or insulted" (103).[59] Spanish language competence was also assessed using the *Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale—Spanish Language Competence subscale*.[60]

Following statistical analyses, Hipolito-Delgado found a significant, inverse relationship between internalized racism and ethnic identity among U.S.-born Latina/o undergraduates.[61] In other words, U.S.-born Latina/o undergraduates who had "stronger" ethnic identities (as indicated by their scores on the *MEIM*) were less likely to experience internalized racism, or to agree with the stereotypes of Latina/os listed on the *Mochihua Tepehuani Scale.* Interestingly, results indicated that perceived racism and ethnic identity among the students in this sample were positively related, such that students who perceived more racism also had "stronger" ethnic

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[57] A composite score is a score obtained by averaging together the scores across all items in a full measure (rather than examining scores by subscale, for example).

[58] Hipolito-Delgado noted that there is no research on whether the *Mochihua Tepehuani Scale* is a valid measure for assessing internalized racism.

[59] The original version of the *EPRI* uses a 5-point Likert response scale, but Hipolito-Delgado modified it such that participants rated their agreement with each item using a 7-point scale (where 1 = *strongly agree* and 7 = *strongly disagree*).

[60] This scale assessed "the extent to which a person feels competent in comprehending, speaking, and reading in Spanish" (Hipolito-Delgado 103).

[61] Hipolito-Delgado used hierarchical linear regression, in which variables could be added into a model one at a time to examine the amount of variance each contributed to overall variance associated with ethnic identity scores. In other words, this method of analysis allows researchers to see the extent to which scores on, say, perceived racism, directly influenced, or were related to, scores on ethnic identity.

identities. Hipolito-Delgado interpreted this finding as suggesting that "perceived racism

enhances ethnic identity development" or, perhaps, that those with "higher ethnic identity" are

"more likely to perceive racism" (105-106).

In addition to interpreting his findings, Hipolito-Delgado discusses their implications for

college counseling. College counselors are advised to work to "challenge internalized racism in

U.S.-born Latina/o undergraduates" who hold "stereotyped beliefs that paint their ethnic group as

inferior" (106). To accomplish this, Hipolito-Delgado suggests that counselors and student

affairs professionals discuss with these students the origins of their bias and help them "identify

evidence to disprove the bias" (106). When Latina/o students are faced with racism, Hipolito-

Delgado encourages counselors to work with these students to develop the kind of skills needed

to detect and process incidents of racism. By having open discussions about experiences of

discrimination with students, counselors can "refute hurtful messages" and remind students that

"racism is based on limited information…and is the product of a racist sociopolitical system"

(106). This understanding of racism is useful in that it takes the oppression of marginalized

groups in society as a given, reinforcing that perceptions of discrimination are real and lived.

By urging counselors to work to disprove biases and discuss issues of racism with

students, Hipolito-Delgado invites a more subjective kind of dialogue for coming to understand

students' ethnic identities in a way that quantitative survey items do not allow. When bias results

from the belief that there is a particular way of being an ethnic subject (and when that particular

way of being is deemed inferior), discussing with students those biases and how they came to be

can be useful insofar as doing so relies on students' existing understanding of their ethnic

identity rather than one from the outside.[62] Disproving the bias, in this case, is counteracting the

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[62] When I say "from the outside" I do not mean to suggest that students' constructions of their ethnic identity are not created from outside messages. The difference is that the constructions provided by survey items are limiting by

notion that there is a particular way of being an ethnic subject in the world. That is not to say,

however, that the counselors who interact with the students are not themselves carrying

particular notions of what constitutes "strong" and "positive" ethnic identities. The difference

here lies in that the Latina/o students have the opportunity to explain how and why they think of

themselves and their ethnic identity in a particular way.

With that said, I now return to my prior point about the language of "promoting" ethnic

identity development. In his study, Hipolito-Delgado describes his findings as being "significant

for college counselors and student affairs professionals" because they "reveal factors that

promote or hinder ethnic identity development in Latina/o undergraduates" (101). What can be

said about this language of "promoting" or "hindering" ethnic identity development? Recall that

in the prior study by Mroczkowski and Sánchez, the language of "promoting" was also used. The

difference between the ways in which study 2 and study 3 used this language, however, lies in

exactly what is being promoted; in study 2, the authors note that their results support

interventions that "promote ethnic identity" whereas in study 3, Hipolito-Delgado suggests that

his findings reveal the factors that promote "ethnic identity *development*."

In the introduction of his study, Hipolito-Delgado defines ethnic identity development as

the process of "changing from a limited understanding of or a negative association with one's

Latina/o heritage to a position of embracing Latina/o ethnicity as an asset" (98). While this

description of development is useful in that it does not necessarily state what that process might

look like for any given person, an issue still remains in that it is unclear what constitutes Latina/o

ethnicity and in what ways these components can be viewed as assets. In other words, despite the

seemingly open definition provided on ethnic identity development, Hipolito-Delgado uses an

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virtue of coming from the outside and being considered to be the elements that constitute ethnic identity, whereas an
ethnic subject might think of different elements as constituting their ethnic identity.

existing measure of ethnic identity (the *MEIM*) in order to set the boundaries for what "limited,"

"negative," and "asset" look like. How, then, could one know what it looks like for a Latina/o

participant to embrace their ethnicity as "an asset," to *develop* their ethnic identity, if the

particulars for what constitutes those assets have already been determined? We run into a similar

issue as in the previous study.

Conclusion

       Assessing a construct like ethnic identity by means of quantitative analysis necessitates

that it be operationalized into variables with fixed beginnings and ends. For something to be a

measure of ethnic identity means that it must create and arrange multiple items in such a way as

to capture the fundamental essence of that which is being measured. In the *MEIM*, items that

supposedly embody different features of ethnic identity (e.g. behaviors, attitudes) are meant be

computed together, allowing for comparative analysis that reveals which subjects are *more*

ethnic than others. The notion that a subject can be *more* ethnic, or more *strongly* ethnic than

another necessarily relies on essentialist and stereotyped understandings of ethnic subjects: they

must perform the appropriately "ethnic" behaviors and they must hold specifically "ethnic"

attitudes for their identity to contain a stronger, more potent kind of "ethnic-ness."

       As I have outlined in the preceding pages, psychology's current approach to measuring

ethnic identity is one that employs a kind of coercive mimeticism, that views "strength" as the

mimicking of internalized, recognizably ethnic attributes. In my analysis of Brown and Chu's

study, I uncovered the assumptions implicit within "positive" and "important" ethnic identity and

questioned such qualities as bases for indicating ethnic identity strength. Later, in study 2, I

traced how research can participate in the perpetuation of ideological myths, rely on essentialist

views of ethnic identity as "protecting" ethnic subjects from adopting alternative attitudes, and

imply that there is a particular way in which ethnic identity can be "promoted." Afterwards, in

Hipolito-Delgado's work, I mapped out the ways in which the language of "promoting" and "hindering" was used in the context of ethnic identity *development,* and examined how the *MEIM*'s formulation of ethnic identity served as the footing for marking the kind of "ethnic" qualities considered to be "assets" worth "promoting."

As a word of caution, my analyses of the language used by and the assumptions inherent to these studies on ethnic identity are not meant to suggest that there is a specific way of being an ethnic subject that these studies merely forgot about or misrepresented. For me to make such a claim would be to fall into the same trap of policing the borders of identity, of imposing a recognizably ethnic subjectivity for purposes of measurement. Rather, my aim in writing this was to trace how psychology conceptualizes ethnic identity and how those essentialist conceptualizations have afterlives that continue to haunt the field for decades.

My argument that psychology's construction of ethnic identity is inherently essentialist begs the question: what does it matter if something *is* essentialist? Is essentialism inherently "wrong" or "bad"? While essentialist perspectives of ethnic-racialized subjects can be dangerous and damaging in that they serve as bases for exclusion, they can also be useful as a political tool. As Maykel Verkuyen points out in *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity:*

> In the literature, terms such as 'anti-anti-essentialism' (Fischer, 1999; Gilroy, 1993; Modood, 1998) have started to appear. It is pointed out that anti-essentialism is far from progressive because it makes all political mobilization rest on a fictive unity. To solve this problem, a distinction between essentialist and political group identification is proposed. Hall (1988, p. 45), for example, analyses racial identity as a necessary fiction in order to make 'both politics and identity possible'. Others talk about 'strategic essentialism' to indicate that in a political context one acts as if essentialism were true. Essentialism is needed for

cultural empowering and political mobilization and would differ from racist

reifications that are used for exclusion (Werbner, 1997).[63]

With that said, the point of this chapter was not to argue for a new form of political

mobilization, but to track the ways in which psychology's understanding of ethnic identity is

tainted with ideology from the start. This becomes especially important considering

psychology's image of itself as an objective, unbiased science. While I do not believe in

ideological purity, I do think that quantitative methodology is the most paralyzing approach for

coming closer to understanding ethnic identity. The instruments and conceptualizations used

within quantitative research necessarily limit the extent to which we can understand ethnic

identity; they are exclusive rather than inclusive and thus can only paint a mutilated picture,

tainted by the outside constructions of what constitutes ethnic subjecthood.

One important point that emerges in this chapter that I would like to emphasize again

here is that psychology's construction of ethnic identity via its operationalization into a variable

is serving to represent while simultaneously participating in its construction. Psychology does

not exist outside of the historical moment in which it hypothesizes, measures, analyzes, and

interprets. In other words, the conceptualization of ethnic identity that the *MEIM* produces is

laced with meaning about how society at large and psychology as a discipline view ethnic

identity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The *MEIM* is, in fact, a historical document that

opens ground for analyzing how features believed to be inherent to ethnic identity change over

time (more on this in the next chapter). What kind of ethnic subject does psychology call into

being?

Another question that arises is: to what degree does psychology influence a subject's

understanding of what it looks like to belong to a given ethnic group? If it is through the

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[63] Verkuyten, "Ethnic Group Essentialism," 126.

socialization practice that subjects come to internalize messages about what it means to be

ethnic, what it looks like to perform one's "ethnic-ness," and psychology is in fact mirroring

those existing notions, could one then argue that psychology *is* capturing ethnic identity as it

exists at that moment? If, however, socialization is taken to be historically changeable and

mutable, so too are identities, and, thus, all identities are open to question. Psychology's ethnic

subject can thus be said to illustrate a single, limited understanding of ethnic identity at this

historical moment in time. Indeed, it appears that psychology does not make room for identities-

in-difference, for mestiza consciousness, for those ambiguous, in-between and hybrid ethnic

identities. Ironically, it is psychology's participation in the production of fixed and crystallized

notions of ethnic identity that results in the formation of these ethnic disidentities, of these ethnic

antisubjects. In the following chapter, I will explore a growing subfield of psychology that

approaches the work it does in psychology in ways that may be useful to a project on the study of

ethnic identity.

—Chapter 2—

In and Against Psychology: Towards a Critical Psychology of Ethnic Identity

> *There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.*
> —Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History/Theses on the Philosophy of History"

> *Traditional approaches in psychology studied human beings in such a way as to try and fix them and hold them in place. When psychologists interpreted what people did, they fixed things in such a way as to block change. Critical psychology is a way of connecting with the process of change and, hence, being part of changing the world. It is only one way of developing alternatives in and against psychology as part of a revolution in subjectivity that we need if we are to take that process forward.*
> —Ian Parker, "Critical Psychology: What It Is and What It Is Not"

> *Empirical psychology is not excluded from being the subject of research. It is a historical reality that empirical psychology has produced research that must be labeled as classist, sexist, and ra*cist.
> —Thomas Teo, "From Speculation to Epistemological Violence in Psychology: A Critical-Hermeneutic Reconstruction"

I'd like to start this chapter by asking a question: what does it mean to be an ethnic subject at this moment in time? That is, how do ethnic subjects experience their ethnic identity at this current sociohistorical moment in time and in this context (USA)? As I indicated in the previous chapter, quantitative studies in psychology attempt to understand the degree to which a person's ethnic identity matches a predetermined construction of what it means to be ethnic. How much do (and can) these measures tell us? Despite their problematic nature, can such conceptualizations still provide useful knowledge about ethnic identity or do they only serve to perpetuate rigid understandings of what it means to be an ethnic subject (i.e., as one who coercively mimics stereotypically "ethnic behaviors")? What would it look like for psychology to seriously take into consideration and employ methods that contemplated the sociohistorical and sociocultural nature of ethnic identity and its development over time? What happens when psychology is made to answer to its critics?

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Critical psychology, a small but growing subfield of psychology, understands identity

and subjectivity as a product of the social world and its everchanging histories and cultures. As

such, it offers theoretical insights and methodologies that can benefit mainstream psychology in

its aim to understand a nebulous construct like identity. Before canvassing critical psychology as

a subfield in more detail, I would like to illustrate the ways in which researchers with a critical

psychological orientation engage with and respond to what they view as theoretical issues in

mainstream psychology. To do so, I have chosen three recent pieces—an article and two

comments on that article published in *American Psychologist* in 2016—that exemplify the kind

of critiques emerging from critical psychology. These are not by any means canonical pieces in

the field. Rather, they were chosen because of their everydayness, because of their organic

emergence in a typical journal issue. In that way, these timely articles more accurately portray

the ways in which knowledge is typically transmitted and debated in psychology.[64]

American Psychologist, established in 1946, is the "official peer-reviewed scholarly

journal of the American Psychological Association" ("American Psychologist: Description").

The American Psychological Association (APA) describes it as a journal that publishes "current

and timely high-impact papers of broad interest, including empirical reports, meta-analyses, and

scholarly reviews covering science, practice, education, and policy" in a style that is "accessible

to all psychologists and the public" ("American Psychologist: Description").[65] The following

quote is taken from an article published in the January 2016 issue of *American Psychologist* and

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[64] This is not to say that groundbreaking studies do not have an impact on the field (of course they do, that is why they are groundbreaking). However, in this section, I do not wish to trace the ways in which a groundbreaking discovery or a frequently used survey tool (like the *MEIM*, which I mentioned in the previous chapter) become disseminated or popularized. Instead, I wish to bring attention to the everyday, run-of-the-mill studies that contribute to the discourse in the field. It is precisely the ordinariness of these studies that make them most interesting when thinking about their potential for communicating or disrupting assumptions in the field.

[65] Currently, in 2017, the journal consists of sixty editors of varying rank, including the editor-in-chief, Anne E. Kazak, the managing editor Susan E. Harris, the editorial manuscript coordinator, David J. Roddy, and several associate, section, and consulting editors from colleges and universities all around the country. See: "American Psychologist: Description," *American Psychological Association.*

reflects a long-time issue in the field of psychology: the generalizability of psychological

research findings:

> It is ethnocultural egocentrism to think that any finding one gets with a United
>
> States college sample will automatically generalize to all populations, much less
>
> believe that those college samples are good indicators of universal psychological
>
> principles (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Different findings around the
>
> world may represent simple moderator effects or measurement error, or they may
>
> suggest important conceptual differences. Without the proper types of conceptual
>
> approaches to that research, it becomes impossible to know.[66]

In their article "On Becoming Multicultural in a Monocultural Research World: A

Conceptual Approach to Studying Ethnocultural Diversity," Hall, Yip, and Zárate affirm "some

basic principles of multicultural psychology" and describe the importance of "clear and

conceptually guided ethnocultural research" (40). They also outline differing approaches to

conducting ethnocultural research in the field of psychology, including generalizability

approaches, group-differences perspectives, and multicultural psychology. They end their article

by proposing a new model to advance multicultural psychology. This new model takes an

"inside-out" perspective, prizing "the perspectives of those in ethnocultural communities that are

underrepresented in research," instead of the existing "conventional approaches to culture" that

"apply existing models to other groups" (Hall et al. 40).

In their December 2016 issue, *American Psychologist* published two comments on the

Hall, Yip, and Zárate article. These two comments are useful in that they illustrate a typical way

in which cultural and cross-cultural psychologists critique each other's work. The first comment,

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[66] Hall, Yip, and Zárate, "On Becoming Multicultural in a Monocultural Research World: A Conceptual Approach to Studying Ethnocultural Diversity," 42.

"The Cultural Psychology Endeavor to Make Culture Central to Psychology: Comment on Hall et al. (2016)," was made by Antonie Dvorakova. In her short comment, Dvorakova points out that Hall, Yip, and Zárate conflate cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology. Specifically, one of cultural psychology's main goals is to challenge the premise of "psychic unity," or that there exist psychological universals, and highlight the ways in which human psychological characteristics are grounded in culture. However, Dvorakova notes that if multicultural psychology, as Hall, Yip, and Zárate suggest, considers "the mechanisms of culture's influence on behavior," then it is more aligned with cross-cultural psychology's treatment of culture (888). Unlike cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology views culture and psyche as "mutually constitutive," and in that way, "goes beyond treating culture as an external variable" (Dvorakova 888). It does not merely compare groups, but rather, furthers "conceptual understanding of ethno-racial and sociocultural diversity" (889). Ultimately, Dvorakova points out that a "true psychology of the human experience"' must research how "historically grounded sociocultural contexts" enable the construction of differing systems of meaning and how such systems "simultaneously guide the human formation of the environments" (888). Dvorakova's points about culture and psyche as mutually constitutive, as well as her call for psychology to consider how the human experience is "historically grounded" across sociocultural contexts, is compatible and in line with arguments made of psychology by critical psychologists, which I will detail later.

The second comment on the Hall, Yip, and Zárate article, "On Methods, Methodologies, and Continued Colonization of Knowledge in the Study of 'Ethnic Minorities': Comment on Hall et al. (2016)," by Oksana Yakushko, Louis Hoffman, Melissa L. Morgan Consoli, and Gordon Lee, argues that research in multicultural psychology continues to reflect "unexamined assumptions" regarding "the exclusive use of natural science methodologies, reliant on Western

scientific paradigms" and "entrenchment in institutionalized research priorities that privilege

efficiency and investigators' career promotion rather than the needs of diverse communities"

(890). They contend that the ways in which psychological research understands ethnic minority

groups "may contribute to the potential for epistemological violence" by interpreting data on

these groups in ways that "perpetuate oppression or are lacking in their focus on social action"

(890).[67] More specifically, Yakushko, Hoffman, Consoli, and Lee point to numerous systemic

issues within psychology as a field, including: its "privileging [of] White European worldviews,"

its "reliance on quantitative methodologies," its "institutionalized favoring of research that is not

consistent with values of ethnic minority communities," and its "lack of focus on the

sociocultural impact of research" (890). Elaborating on each of these points, the authors note that

research methodologies "have implicit philosophical and epistemological assumptions" and that,

within Western psychology, research has been "rooted in positivism and reflects an approach to

knowledge that attempts to measure, categorize, and label human behavior" (890).[68] When

conducting research on multicultural populations, Yakushko and colleagues stress the need to

challenge the hegemony of Western psychology by including perspectives that "value

intersubjectivity and pluralistic notions of science" and that focus on empowerment and

emancipation (890). Moreover, to these researchers, the lack of consideration for qualitative

methods in the Hall et al. article signals the "continued dominance of natural science paradigms"

(Yakushko et al. 891) that decontextualize human experience and are thus monocultural

themselves.

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[67] "Epistemological violence" is a term coined by critical psychologist Thomas Teo. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will return to this concept and examine it more closely.

[68] Later in this chapter, I will provide a detailed discussion of positivism, a deeply-rooted framework in mainstream psychology.

The ways in which research is *interpreted* can also be problematic and contribute to what Thomas Teo refers to as "epistemological violence."[69] Teo urges that researchers must attend to both how knowledge is *produced* and how it can be *used* in the "perpetuation of oppression and injustice" (Yakushko et al. 891). Yakushko et al. believe that the goal of psychological research with ethnic minority populations should be to make implicit the "unconscious institutionalized sources and expressions of racism, including internalized forms of oppression among marginalized individuals themselves" (891). Thus, their comment calls for broader attention towards the issue of epistemological violence in research, biased interpretations of data with ethnic minority populations, and a greater consideration for social justice perspectives in such research. Yakushko et al.'s critiques of and suggestions for mainstream psychologists situate them on the side of "critical psychologists."

The preceding commentaries on Hall et al. (2016) provide me an opportunity to segue into the subfield of critical psychology, which I argue articulates and provides the kind of theories and tools useful for expanding upon conceptualizations of ethnic identity and subjectivity in modern, mainstream psychology. Both Dvorakova and Yakushko et al. make comments that point to Hall et al.'s need to consider sociocultural perspectives and alternative epistemologies, critiques central to critical psychology's principles. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will thus outline the emergence of critical psychology as a subfield, differentiate it from mainstream psychology, and draw attention to its various epistemological frameworks and methodologies. Afterwards, I will return to the points from the previous chapter and deliberate on critical psychology's potential contributions to mainstream psychology's conceptualizations of ethnic identity. As I will show, critical psychology should be more widely adopted by

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[69] See: Teo, "Empirical Race Psychology and Hermeneutics of Epistemological Violence"; and Teo "From Speculation to Epistemological Violence in Psychology a Critical Hermeneutic Reconstruction."

mainstream psychology/psychologists as everyday practice in the field. Doing so can only

expand our understanding of the psyche and psychological experience by considering how these

constructs are constituted in and by historically grounded sociocultural contexts. In addition to

expanding our understanding of subjectivity, critical psychology views its work as inherently

tied to social justice, opening up greater possibilities for change.

The Emergence of Critical Psychology

The last thirty years have seen a boom in critical psychology scholarship. Critical

psychology is an emerging and rapidly expanding subfield in and on the margins of psychology

that works to challenge the assumptions and methods inherent to mainstream psychology. It

takes root in a variety of different theoretical approaches and practices, including Marxist theory,

feminism, critical race theory, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, social constructionism, and

discourse/power studies, to name a few. Given these various approaches to critical psychology—

which may at times contradict each other—one may wonder what exactly "unifies" the subfield.

Indeed, critical psychologists themselves have noted the difficulty in providing a single

definition of critical psychology. To capture its multiple dimensions more closely, this section

provides several definitions of the subfield and explores some of its more prominent features.

In *Critical Psychology: An Introduction, 2ⁿᵈ ed.* Dennis Fox, Isaac Prilleltensky, and

Stephanie Austin define critical psychology, broadly, as "a variety of approaches that challenge

assumptions, values, and practices within mainstream psychology that help maintain an unjust

and unsatisfying status quo" (18). Brendan Gough, Majella McFadden, and Matthew McDonald

prefer the term "critical psychologies" to denote the "multiple but related critical projects located

at the margins of psychology (4*).* In "Critical Psychology: What It Is and What It Is Not," Ian

Parker provides several definitions of it, one of which describes it as "the study of the ways in

which all varieties of psychology are culturally historically constructed, and how alternative

varieties of psychology may confirm or resist ideological assumptions in mainstream models"

(2). Put simply, Parker views the "critical" in "critical psychology" as a way of finding a place

"in and against psychology" (*Handbook* 7).

Before moving into the theories and methods of critical psychology, I want to briefly

cover parts of its genealogy (to provide readers with more context): In 1991, Cambridge

University Press published *Critical Psychology: Contributions to an Historical Science of the*

Subject by Charles W. Tolman and Wolfgang Maiers.[70] The first introductory book on critical

psychology was later published in 1997 and edited by Isaac Prilleltensky and Dennis Fox. Two

years later, the first critical psychology journal, the *Annual Review of Critical Psychology,*

published its inaugural issue.[71] In 2000, Tod Sloan's *Critical Psychology: Voices for Change—*

which featured question-and-answer interviews with several critical psychologists—was released

in the USA and the UK, respectively. Eight years later, Sage Publications published Michael

Billig's *The Hidden Roots of Critical Psychology.*

Twelve years after the first introductory critical psychology book was published, in 2009,

the same two editors (Fox and Prilleltensky, plus a new one, Stephanie Austin) published the 2nd

edition of the book. That same year, Brendan Gough, Majella McFadden, and Matthew

McDonald published the 2nd edition of *Critical Social Psychology: An Introduction.* In 2011,

Routledge released a multi-volume collection entitled *Critical Psychology: Critical Concepts in*

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[70] In their preface, Tolman and Maiers note that they were among those who "gathered in Plymouth, U.K., from 30 August to 2 September 1985" for the founding conference of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology (vii). It appears to be at this conference in 1985 where the idea of translating the work of German Critical Psychologists into English first emerged, subsequently introducing critical psychology to the UK, the USA, and other English-speaking countries. The theories informing German Critical Psychology and how we think of critical psychology today, however, have a much longer history and can be traced to thinkers like Marx and Foucault, among others.

[71] On its website, the journal is described as "an international peer review open access publication developing varieties of critical research concerned with language, subjectivity and practice" ("Annual Review," *Discourse Unit*). The journal is edited by Ian Parker, a prominent figure in the field who has published extensively on critical psychology.

Psychology, 4 Volumes, edited by Ian Parker. A year later, Routledge also published Derek

Hook's *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid.* More recently, in

2015, the first handbook of critical psychology was published by Routledge and edited by Ian

Parker, who currently edits the 'Concepts for Critical Psychology' Routledge series. On their

webpage, Routledge provides a useful description of critical psychology:

> Developments inside psychology that question the history of the discipline and
>
> the way it functions in society have led many psychologists to look outside the
>
> discipline for new ideas. This series draws on cutting edge critiques from just
>
> outside psychology in order to complement and question critical arguments
>
> emerging inside. The authors provide new perspectives on subjectivity from
>
> disciplinary debates and cultural phenomena adjacent to traditional studies of the
>
> individual.[72]

Critical psychology, then, can be thought of as arising *as a response* to several issues

across the various subfields of psychology, drawing from theories and critiques from cultural

studies, literary theory, philosophy, sociology, and other fields. To facilitate our understanding of

critical psychology, I will outline the specific ways in which it takes issue with mainstream

psychology. In the *Handbook of Critical Psychology,* Ian Parker points out that critical

psychologists tend to take most issue with mainstream psychology's (1) gaze, (2) reductionism,

(3) positivism, (4) interpretation, and (5) neutrality. These five points or critiques, described in

more detail below, will structure the discussion of critical psychology and pave the way for

understanding its general principles, broadly speaking.

Critical psychologists view mainstream psychology's "gaze," which is directed at "those

outside the discipline," as deeply problematic in that it actively separates those who are inside

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[72] "Concepts for Critical Psychology: Disciplinary Boundaries Re-thought," *Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.*

the discipline from those "viewed as being 'outside'" (Parker *Handbook* 3). In other words,

critical psychologists take issue with the "one-way" street that structures contemporary

psychology and the way in which it "describes, measures, and speculates about" people

positioned as "other" (Parker *Handbook* 3). Such descriptions and speculations about those

"outside" of psychology are often misrepresentative and, as such, may even negatively impact

people belonging to marginalized communities. Critical psychologists are thus interested in

studying *the psychologist* and the ways in which they gaze upon their objects of study and

understand, conceptualize, and interpret their research findings. They question why it is that

certain "varieties" of psychology are privileged over others and they seek to understand the ways

in which "dominant accounts of 'psychology' operate ideologically and in the service of power"

(Parker "Critical Psychology" 2). Psychology is understood not only as a field that employs

certain theoretical frameworks, which are themselves assumption-laden, but also as a social

practice that is itself grounded within the current historical context. The elements that constitute

psychology's way of knowing, or as Parker describes it, the "psy-complex," are placed under the

microscope and questioned.[73] I believe that this project is working to accomplish precisely this

act of reversing the gaze, of placing psychology under the microscope, in order to examine the

ways in which the "psy-complex" participates in constructing narratives about what it means to

"be ethnic."

Following psychology's gaze, critical psychologists also take issue with its reductionism,

or the way in which psychology tends to "reduce phenomena to the level of the individual"

(Parker *Handbook* 3). Interestingly, there appears to be a kind of double-reductionism operating

within psychology. Parker writes that this reductionism "proceeds both downwards from the

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[73] Parker defines the "psy-complex" as "the material and ideological meshwork of psychological ideas and institutions that structure academic departments, professional interventions, and popular-cultural representations of mind and behavior" (*Handbook* 6).

level of social processes" as well as "upwards from the level of physiological functions" (*Handbook* 3). That is, critical psychologists disagree with psychology's views of itself as the "master discipline" of subjectivity which positions sociology (and fields in the humanities) as threatening while viewing biology/neuroscience as gospel. For psychology, biology and neuroscience appear to be the fields that provide the scientific evidence indicating that psychological phenomenon has been conceptualized correctly. That psychology positions itself more closely to biology and the natural sciences, however, is not a mere coincidence. It does, in fact, have a history, and in the introduction to this thesis, I pointed out that the Psychology department at Duke, for example, is actually called "Department of Psychology & Neuroscience." In "The Role of Biology in the Advent of Psychology: Neuropsychoanalysis and the Foundation of a Mental Life of Causality," Ariane Bazan maps out how psychology came to align itself with natural sciences like biology. She points out that in the mid-nineteenth century, psychology, which was at the time still regarded as a branch of philosophy, "emancipated itself as an autonomous domain of science" (175). This happened at a time when biology was flourishing and new discoveries in neurophysiology were made, resulting in a recognition that "what had previously been ascribed to the soul was in fact taken care of by the body" (Bazan 175). Critical psychologists, in contrast to mainstream psychologists, do not wish to replace psychology with another discipline, but rather, "redefine the space for interdisciplinary or 'transdisciplinary' research into subjectivity" (Parker *Handbook* 4).[74] Earlier in this thesis, I discussed the difficulty of conducting interdisciplinary work at Duke using Littlefield and Johnson's text on transdisciplinarity. Critical psychology, as I have mentioned and as Curt and

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[74] See: Curt, *Textuality and Tectonics: Troubling Social and Psychological Science* for more information on redefining the space for transdisciplinary work in subjectivity.

Parker have pointed out, actively seeks to think of subjectivity in an interdisciplinary, or

transdisciplinary, way, suggesting its openness to the kind of work I am doing in this thesis.

Psychology's resistance to collaborating with the humanities appears to be, in part, fueled

by its seemingly unyielding adherence to positivism. According to Parker, psychology

operationalizes constructs in a way that produces "abstracted model[s] of behavioral sequences

and cognitive mechanisms" (*Handbook* 4). Due to the positivist nature of the field, psychology

ends up viewing people as "miniature versions" of its operationalization of constructs into

variables. To clarify, a field is said to be "positivist" if it relies on transforming concepts into

"measurable variables" and assessing the "functional relationship" between these variables

through experiments and studies (Teo "Theoretical Psychology" 120). Positivism is concerned

with methodology and often views it as more important than "substantive reflections," to the

point of "excluding the context of discovery (why a researcher is interested in a research

question), the context of interpretation (the quality of discussion), and the context of application"

(Teo "Theoretical Psychology" 120). Positivist fields assume that, by being so concerned with

methodology, they "mirror the outside world without bias" and conduct studies "without

preconceived notions, theories, or values"; in other words, they assume value-neutrality, as if

their knowledge were without "politics, culture, and society" (Teo "Theoretical Psychology"

120). This was precisely the issue I took with the *MEIM* in the previous chapter, where I

unveiled the essentialist and ahistorical nature of its operationalization of ethnic identity into a

variable for purposes of quantitative assessment. Critical psychology critiques mainstream

psychology at a conceptual and methodological level, wishing not only to contend with models

of the individual, but to also track how it is that psychologists build such models, collect data,

construct research designs, and then implement and interpret quantitative findings.[75]

      Critical psychologists are also frustrated by the way in which psychology pretends to

"merely describe human activity," as if the interpretation of data were not a highly subjective

process guided by the ideological positioning of researchers (*Handbook* 4). Critical psychology

thus aims to illuminate the ways in which psychology, which paints itself as an objective science

untainted by any one ideological inclination, is in fact infused with particular and often

undeclared ideological presuppositions about the objects of their analysis. That mainstream

psychology is not transparent about the ideological nature of its conceptualization of constructs

and interpretation of data suggests, then, that "the psychologist knows best" (*Handbook* 4). Fox

et al. note that dominant cultural, economic, and political institutions "use psychological

knowledge and techniques to maintain an unacceptable status quo" and that psychology, rather

than work to unveil or resist these uses of psychological science, strengthen them through its

portrayal of itself as an objective science (4). For these reasons, a critical psychological approach

has become increasingly important, especially in work that studies ethnic identity. By bringing

greater attention to its own ideological suppositions, psychology will be better equipped to

ensure its knowledge is not used to maintain an unacceptable status quo or, for example, to

sustain dangerous narratives about ethnic-racialized subjects. In the next chapter, I will introduce

Teo's concept of psychology's "hermeneutic deficit" to detail this process more clearly.

      Alongside the problem of psychology's portrayal of itself as an objective science is that

of its "fake neutrality," a form of objectivity that Parker asserts "obscures the enduring role of

personal, institutional, and political stakes in the formulation of research questions" (*Handbook*

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[75] Parker notes that this is not to suggest that qualitative research is necessarily a "progressive alternative" (*Handbook* 4). I will address the "quantitative vs. qualitative" debate later in this chapter.

4). Given this widespread notion of psychology as politically neutral, Parker points out that the position of the researcher "needs to be closely studied," as doing so will illuminate why psychologists are concerned with the kinds of questions they ask (*Handbook* 4). In the same vein, Parker points to the importance of "reflexivity," a type of reflection in which a subject, in this case a researcher, considers the limitations inherent to the observations they make in their work as a result of their "personal history and their structural position in relation to their objects of study" (*Handbook* 4). In "The Reflexive Journey: Mapping Multiple Routes," Linda Finlay describes reflexivity as the process through which researchers "turn a critical gaze towards themselves" (3). Earlier, in the introduction to this thesis, I engaged in reflexivity by being transparent about my personal motivations for doing this work, guiding readers through the development of the questions I am asking in this thesis. Reflexivity, while a common practice in qualitative research, is, unfortunately, rarely practiced in quantitative studies. For the reasons previously discussed (e.g. positivism, claims to "objectivity," neutrality), quantitative research tends to conceal its subjective nature and thus espouse claims to authority more freely. I will return to the notion of reflexivity again at the end of the next chapter.

Ultimately, while critical psychologists look for resistance in ideas that challenge the status quo in psychology, Parker notes that, deep down, they "do not really…believe any of them" ("Critical Psychology" 2). What he means by this is that, instead of seeking some underlying truth, critical psychologists prefer to "to look for political tactics" by way of critical dialectic activity (2). Any claims to a "true" human psychology, Parker tells us, "tend to operate as a political program…rooted in the limited political horizons of the present day" (6). Indeed, no conceptualization of say, ethnic identity, is "neutral" or "objective," free from social, cultural, historical, and political influence; nothing is outside of or above the social structure in which it is produced and produces. Phinney and the researchers using her measure of ethnic identity, for

example, did not discuss the constructedness of ethnic identity as depicted in the *MEIM*. Instead, they emphasized, as is common practice in the field of mainstream psychology, that the *MEIM* was both high in reliability and validity, suggesting their "objectively verified" stamp of approval. When considering something like an alternative to Phinney's *MEIM,* I should note that critical psychologists would not be "for" constructing an "alternative psychology" of ethnic identity, as doing so, Parker states, will "merely serve to smuggle into radical politics reductionist and essentialist ideas," which will then "turn the radicals back into psychologists again" ("Critical Psychology" 12). In other words, critical psychologists already acknowledge that they are incapable of producing any sort of "objective" or "neutral" truth. This is not to say that psychologists studying ethnic identity should just "give up." Rather, the point I am trying to make here is that mainstream psychologists need to be reflexive about the work that they produce and recognize and be explicit about the ideological nature of their "empirically verified" constructs. Allow me to discuss, in more detail, the relationship between critical psychology and ethnic identity as conceptualized by the *MEIM*.

How Does Ethnic Identity Factor In?

> *For contemporary psychology to be regarded as a scientific discipline it is crucial to represent human subjectivity as embedded in historical and social contexts.*
> —Thomas Teo, "Philosophical Concerns in Critical Psychology"

> *…critical social psychology uses terms such as 'subjectivity' and 'identities' to suggest a fluid, multiple process embedded in social practices, institutions and discourses, but not completely determined by these – identity is constructed, negotiated and defended in relation to other people and in light of prevailing values and conventions.*
> —Brendan Gough, Majella McFadden, and Matthew McDonald, "Self, Identity, Subjectivity"

In the previous chapter, I made the case that mainstream psychology's conceptualizations of ethnic identity, when operationalized for purposes of quantitative analysis, are inherently essentializing. By placing restrictive boundaries around what it means to be an ethnic subject— that is, by determining the elements that constitute ethnic identity "strength"—psychology paints

an image of ethnic subjects that is, quite frankly, stereotypical. No subject exists outside of the

structures—be they linguistic, cultural, historical, etc.—that mold the production of their

subjectivity. Given that subjectivity is embedded in the very sociohistorical context in which a

person exists, and given that we live in a world that transcends borders, becoming increasingly

globalized, one must wonder: what sorts of implications do these transitory forces have on

identity? If the world is changing, so are we; we are all, and always, subjects in flux. What, if

anything, can critical psychology offer mainstream psychology's conceptualizations of ethnic

identity?

Ethnic identity is an especially fascinating construct to study because of its relationship to

"culture" and "history." Psychologists tend to approach "culture" and "history" as if they were

stable, immutable concepts. One of the items on Phinney's *MEIM* measuring ethnic behavior,

mentioned in the previous chapter, for example, reads: "I participate in cultural practices of my

own group, such as special food, music, or customs" (173). What does it mean for a group to

have a set of "cultural practices" unique to that group ("of my own group") and can these

practices not change over time? If members of an ethnic group consume food, listen to music, or

participate in customs that are outside of what is deemed to strictly belong to that group, does the

notion of their culture not become reworked, reshaped? Is it the case that belonging to an ethnic

group means always eating the same food, listening to the same music, or participating in the

same customs?

Perhaps this is not what the researchers meant; after all, the item does not specify these as

behaviors one must *always* engage in. Instead, the response format allows participants to choose

the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement. However, despite the response

format, the *MEIM* is designed so that participants' responses to different items are averaged

together, creating a composite score of ethnic identity strength. For example, say that a

participant "strongly agrees" that they participate in the cultural practices of their own group, and say that they "strongly agree" with several other "ethnic" items (or disagree, if those items are reverse-scored). The *MEIM* is scored such that, when these items are averaged together, a participant is marked as having a "stronger" ethnic identity if they engage more frequently or agree more often with these "ethnic" item components. Thus, regardless of the researchers' intentions, it doesn't matter how and why a participant engages in certain practices; in the end, they are either marked as having a strong, and thus more preferable, ethnic identity the more they agree that they engage in these practices.

It is obvious that the food, music, and customs "of a particular group" do not magically come to be or become associated with that group out of thin air—everything came about from a history, and history is always writing itself. Thus, to consider ethnic behavior as engaging in a fixed set of "cultural practices," in engaging in behaviors specifically deemed to be "ethnic," researchers in psychology limit the extent to which ethnic subjects can experience their ethnic identity as anything other than engaging in stereotypically ethnic behaviors. Such is the problem of attempting to measure ethnic identity "strength"—it necessarily requires that one embody what is, as Chow puts it, "recognizably ethnic" ("Keeping Them" 107). As an ethnic subject, my ethnic identity is more than the rice and beans I eat; every behavior I engage in *is* an "ethnic behavior." How will Phinney measure that?

This brings me to a fundamental question: what exactly *is* culture? For Phinney, culture boils down to "cultural practices," to those aspects of a culture that can easily be measured: do I eat rice and beans often? (At home, sure. On occasion. At the predominantly White institution I attend? There aren't any). Do I listen to Celia Cruz? (Not really—I don't particularly care for salsa). Did I have a quinceañera? (Unfortunately). While these are all activities an ethnic subject may engage in, to see these as the basic elements of a culture—which ethnic subjects must

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respond to *in a particular way* in order to authenticate their "ethnic-ness"—is nothing short of reductive. Again, cultures are always changing, and culture is experienced differently by every person who "belongs" to a "culture."

Another question that further complicates ethnic identity relates to its relationship to history: what history and as interpreted by whom and in what way? Are we talking about the colonial moment? A movement, revolution, or war? Immigration? When Phinney called on Campbell to state that "cultural differences are interpretable only against a background of assumed similarities" (158), she also pointed out that while each group has "its unique history, traditions, and values," it is the concept of "group identity" that is "common to all groups" (158). Yet, one of the items that attempts capture the construct of "group identity," that attempts to capture "ethnic identity achievement" is "I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs" (172). To strongly agree with this statement is to tip the balance over into "strong ethnic identity" territory.

I would argue, however, that every ethnic subject has "achieved" ethnic identity by simply existing. Every ethnic subject is a subject with an ethnic identity, and every aspect of subjectivity experienced by ethnic subjects tells us something about what it means to be an ethnic subject in the world at a distinct moment in time. If one has not spent time investigating their ethnic group's histories and customs, their ethnic identity is not "weaker" or "less strong." Is it not enough to *live* out what it is to be an ethnic subject? Is it more valuable to actively "find out more" about a group's history than to literally live it every day? Why does Phinney privilege one way of knowing over others?

Interestingly, Phinney has noted that it is becoming increasingly recognized that "ethnic identity is not a static phenomenon" (160). In his groundbreaking 1968 work, *Identity: Youth and Crisis,* Erik Erikson, who Phinney cites in her description of identity achievement, emphasized

the importance of recognizing identity as a *process,* noting that "identity is never 'established' as

an 'achievement'" (24).[76] Erikson viewed identity as "a process of simultaneous reflection and

observation…by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the

way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to

them" (22). In Phinney's *MEIM*, however, she conceptualizes high ethnic identity achievement

as involving "both exploration and commitment" as reflected in a participant's "efforts to learn

more about [their] background and a clear understanding of the role of ethnicity for

[themselves]" (161). Despite her recognition that ethnic identity is not a static phenomenon,

Phinney relies on static notions of "exploration" and "commitment," such that it is not enough to

be, one must also *do,* and do in a way determined by others. How is it that participants can judge

themselves using a "typology significant to them" when that typology becomes determined from

without, by Phinney and others?[77] Due to the nature of quantitative methods, researchers

studying identity cannot create typologies significant to participants; they can only create

typologies that they believe *should* be significant to participants and their ethnic identity.

Thus, thinking about ethnic identity using critical psychology is useful precisely because

it considers process and makes room for fluidity in a way that is not restricted to essentialist

elements. Teo insightfully notes that mainstream psychologists "often pretend that constructed

concepts are natural concepts because they have empirical support" but that "empirical support

says nothing about the ontological status of a concept" ("Philosophical Concerns" 41). When

thinking about the *MEIM* and its reliance on quantitative methodology as a means to pin down

and differentiate between the aspects that constitute ethnic identity, we are left with more

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[76] See: Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis.*

[77] This is not to suggest that typologies are not socially constructed (and thus "from without"). Rather, the point I am making here is that, due to the predetermined nature of the categories provided by Phinney, participants are already further restricted in how they think about their ethnic identity the moment they begin filling out the *MEIM.*

questions than answers. The very concept of ethnic identity *disrupts* or does not allow itself to be captured by way of quantitative research methods (by which I mean the atomization that comes with the understanding of psychological and social constructs). Questions about ontological status, about individual subjective experience, are not broached in quantitative psychological research.

Considering this discussion on quantitative methods in psychology, I want to take a moment to pick up on a note that I hinted at in the previous chapter: quantitative methods are not inherently "bad" and qualitative methods are not inherently the solution. Often times, psychological "facts" are thought to "speak for themselves," however, as Teo notes, "those 'facts' or 'empirical knowledge'" contain "data and interpretations" ("Philosophical Concerns" 45). Given that data must be *interpreted,* there are therefore a variety of ways in which one could theoretically approach using data to create a narrative explanation. The use of quantitative methods depends "on the subject matter" and depending on what the subject matter is and how data are interpreted, "quantitative methods can be critical and can challenge the status quo" (Teo "Philosophical Concerns" 46). Given the ending of the prior section, this idea allows mainstream psychologists to breathe with relief.

In the same vein, in *White Logic, White Methods,* Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva emphasize that data themselves "do not tell us a story," but, rather, are used "to craft a story that comports with our understanding of the world" (7). Given that statistics "do not prove anything beyond the numerical relationship between two or more lists of numbers or variables," the ways in which one goes about *interpreting* statistical results has a lot to do with the *theory* one uses (9). If the theory we use includes a "racially biased view of the world," for instance, then the data will be interpreted in a way that is racially biased (7). Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva

point out that much of social science research using quantitative methods has fallen prey to using "White logic" when interpreting data:

> By speaking of *logic* we refer to both the foundation of the techniques used in analyzing empirical reality, and the reasoning used by researchers in their efforts to understand society. *White logic,* then, refers to a context in which White supremacy has defined the techniques and processes of reasoning about social facts. White logic assumes a historical posture that grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite Whites and condemns the views of non-Whites to perpetual subjectivity; it is the anchor of the Western imagination, which grants centrality to the knowledge, history, science, and culture of elite White men and classifies "others" as people without knowledge, history, or science, as people with folklore but not culture.[78,79,80]

What is most comforting about the notion of White logic is that it suggests a certain kind of logic grounded in a sociohistorical context, one that may have power but is not as factual or objective as it likes to think. Researchers using quantitative methods, then, *do* have the option to interpret their findings in a way that, as Teo says, can challenge the status quo rather than perpetuate "epistemological violence."

With that said, I also want to acknowledge that qualitative methods are not always the solution. Recall that at the beginning of this chapter, I discussed a conversation currently taking place in the mainstream psychology journal, *American Psychologist,* in which two comments

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[78] Zuberi, and Bonilla-Silva, *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, 17.
[79] Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva also point out that members of all racialized groups can and do use "White logic and White methods," reproducing the status quo, and that, therefore, they are not suggesting that "racial subalterns, simply because of their position in the racial order, are better able to understand the social world" (18).
[80] For a discussion on how psychological research might benefit from adopting a critical race psychology as a theoretical basis see: Salter and Adams, "Toward a Critical Race Psychology"; and Adams and Salter, "A Critical Race Psychology is Not Yet Born."

were made in response to an article by Hall et al. Following the comments made by Dvorakova

and Yakushko et al., Hall et al. provided a response to their points. In response to Yakushko et

al. and their argument of "epistemological violence" (originally made by Thomas Teo), Hall et

al. contended that they "do not view any particular research method as inherently contributing to

'epistemological violence'" ("Disciplinary Perspectives" 893). Rather, like Zuberi and Bonilla-

Silva, Hall et al. point out that it is the "misguided application and/or interpretation of data

generated from such methods" that perpetuate oppression ("Disciplinary Perspectives" 893).

They make the case that qualitative methods are not inherently immune to this; they too can be

misused depending, again, on the theory informing the project and on the theory used to interpret

findings.

It is important to remember that qualitative methods are "not inherently critical" and can

thus be used to "confirm theory-driven quantitative research" and "buttress mainstream

psychological concepts" (Gough 107). Just as with quantitative research, it is vital that

interpretations of qualitative data be critical and bring to light dominant and oppressive

ideologies rather than perpetuate them. Qualitative data, rather than serve to simply "add color to

quantitative data," has the potential to highlight the complexities and fluidities of subjective

experience, and should thus be matched with perspectives that center marginalized voices and

push for more complex understandings of subjective experience (Gough 113).

What critical psychologists want to say, contrary to suggesting that one type of

methodology is superior to another, is that researchers must bring "greater attention to the

importance of exploring the epistemological bases of our methodological and research design

choices" (Cosgrove, Wheeler, and Kosterina 20). Moving away from the quantitative/qualitative

divide and thinking about how both can be approached using new interpretive frameworks has

the potential to produce new knowledges and increase something akin to "transdisciplinary"

collaboration between mainstream and critical psychologists.[81]

Returning now to the conversation of ethnic identity, I'd like to refer the reader back to

an argument in the previous chapter and consider how it might be that psychological research

findings related to ethnic identity can be alternatively understood through critical psychology.

Recall that, in the previous chapter, I noted that several researchers using the *MEIM* as a measure

of ethnic identity strength (specifically, Mroczkowski and Sánchez, and Hipolito-Delgado)

suggested that more be done to strengthen (or, in their words, "promote") students' ethnic

identity in order to produce more favorable outcomes related to academic achievement and well-

being. When thinking about practice and interventions related to ethnic identity based on these

research studies, one must remember that the findings from these studies are produced as a result

of a particular conceptualization of ethnic identity.

In "Philosophical Concerns in Critical Psychology," Teo points out that "psychological

practice is interconnected with epistemology and ontology" and, thus, "if one assumes that

humans act like machines, then practice will emphasize control, manipulation, and technologies"

(48). What Teo is underscoring here is the ways in which practice—be it clinical or in another

concrete form like an intervention—based on psychological research will mirror the same

epistemological and ontological issues inherent to the theories informing research on which those

practices are based on. Thus, if we understand ethnic identity as the *MEIM* does, as involving

components that constitute ethnic identity strength, what would interventions stemming from

research on ethnic identity using the *MEIM* look like? Would such interventions treat ethnic

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[81] While I agree with the point that there needs to be increased collaboration between mainstream and critical psychologists, I want to be clear that, with regards to the point on the quantitative/qualitative divide, I still stand by the argument I made in the last chapter. That is, while it is important to move away from the divide, in the case of conceptualizing ethnic identity for the purposes of quantitative assessment, researchers need to practice reflexivity and be transparent about the subjectivity of the interpretations they make based on measures of ethnic identity like the *MEIM*.

subjects as machines in which one inputs stereotypically ethnic cultural material in order to

produce a "stronger" ethnic identity? Would they force feed me rice and beans and make me take

salsa lessons at gunpoint?

While obviously an exaggeration meant to be comical, such stereotypically ethnic

practices mirror the kind of assumptions undergirding the *MEIM*, wherein ethnic identity boils

down to the performance of recognizably ethnic behaviors and one's subjective experience as an

ethnic subject within a sociohistorical context is deemphasized. For Teo, the "culturally

embedded concepts used in psychological theories" express "a certain worldview and are

ideological (that is, they may serve the interest of power and money)" ("Philosophical Concerns"

42). If researchers wish to produce work that serve the interest of marginalized populations

rather than perpetuate a certain worldview and serve the interest of power, adopting alternate

theoretical frameworks that work to highlight complexity and the cultural embeddedness of their

own work is crucial.[82] One example of a theoretical framework that psychological work could

benefit from involves challenging Western society's tendency to fault marginalized people for

their own misfortunes (an issue that can at times become automatic in a field that focuses heavily

on the individual). Gough et al. highlight this issue when they say that:

> …the Western capitalist spotlight on individuals rather than societies facilitates a
>
> politics where individuals are blamed for problems which might otherwise be
>
> conceived in terms of social factors. So that when people in contemporary
>
> Western society seek to account for the likely origins of their own experiences of
>
> ill-health, disempowerment and inequality they typically have a propensity to

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[82] I realize that this has become increasingly difficult as a result of the institutional cultures in which researchers work—issues like "publish or perish," for example, lead researchers in academic institutions to focus on quantity over quality. Yakushko et al. point to this when they write that: "…as Wachtel (1980) noted several decades ago, much of the research in psychology is driven by faculty's need to gain grants and receive tenure which cause them to focus on more 'efficient' research topics and methods and fails to promote an institutional atmosphere of support for culturally sensitive community-based research" (891).

'discount the harmful effects of those social and material adversities with which they may be struggling, and instead attribute their problems to their own apparent lack of will power, or internal moral resolve' (Moloney & Kelly, 2008: 280)."[83]

Psychological work seeking to understand ethnic identity, then, should focus on challenging this dominant strain of thinking in Western society. To give an example, in the previous chapter, I argued that economic value of education (EVE) relied heavily on the ideological myth of meritocracy, or the notion that hard work "pays off." In their study, Mroczkowski and Sánchez viewed ethnic identity (along with gender) as a moderator variable that could serve to buffer the negative impact of racial discrimination on students' perception of the EVE. Producing subjects with a particular ethnic identity, one that was "strong" in a preset way and that could buffer the impact of racial discrimination on the ideological construct of the EVE, located the "issue" of students' lack of belief in the economic value of education as a problem of *ethnic identity*, rather than a problem related to the systemic issue of *racial discrimination*. This is not to say that racial discrimination does not influence ethnic identity. Rather, this is to show how an "issue" that could more appropriately be tied to discriminatory social structures is, instead, seen as a problem of individuals who are somehow "hindered" by their ethnic identity (which, these researchers tell us, are in need of being "promoted").

One must wonder why this line of research is more interested in investigating how ethnic subjects can come to believe in an ideological construct (such as the EVE) more strongly—to the point of suggesting more be done to "promote ethnic identity"—rather than investigating why it is that so many ethnic subjects question the EVE (which could have something to do with observed societal barriers). This is, in part, an issue of lens. Mainstream psychological research, as I showed in the previous section, tends to focus on "the individual" to an extent that

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[83] Gough, McFadden, and McDonald, *Critical Social Psychology: An Introduction, 2nd ed.,* 161.

obfuscates the influence of systemic, societal issues. The goal of these researchers is clearly a noble one: improve students' academic outcomes. However, we must question whether increasing students' belief in the EVE is really the solution. Is this kind of work, while seemingly "neutral," simply reproducing a particular kind of ethnic citizen rather than disrupting the very social order that has limited ethnic subjects' opportunities?

Furthermore, we must additionally question what it means for researchers to push for the "promotion" of ethnic identity. In the case of Mroczkowski and Sánchez's study, a student with a "promoted" or "stronger" ethnic identity is one who believes in the ideology that education necessarily "pays off." We must understand that while developing resilience may be useful in the face of difficult systemic issues, outright ignoring the problems that may be "conceived in terms of social factors" (Gough et al.) reinforces the notion that these issues are the problems of lacking individuals whose identities need to be bolstered rather than larger, institutionalized problems. When, for example, surveys are finding that for every 100 B.A. recipients, 43 of them are likely to be in a professional/managerial position if they are White compared to 16 of them if they are Latinx and for every 100 professional/Ph.D. recipients, 77 of them are likely to be in a professional/managerial position if they are White compared to 24 of them if they are Latinx, we must consider whether the problem is really located in individuals with "weak" ethnic identities (Pérez Huber, Vélez, and Solórzano "Degrees with 'Value'"). What some of the research on the "value" of education is telling us is that there is less "payoff" for Latinx B.A. and professional/Ph.D. recipients compared to White ones. The students in Mroczkowski and Sánchez's study might just be attuned to that reality.

Returning to practice, Gough et al. recognize critical social psychology as a subfield that takes into consideration "the various representations of self on offer in a given culture" and that is interested in exploring how such representations are "taken up, re-worked or even resisted by

people in the way they talk about themselves" (160). Critical psychology, then, could be thought

of as a space in which identities that don't fit into neat categories—like Gloria Anzaldúa's

mestiza consciousness and Jose Muñoz's identities in difference from the previous chapter—are

understood precisely as telling us something about what it means to be an ethnic subject at a

certain moment in time rather than as "weak" ethnic identities. The ways in which these ethnic

identities came to be, and the ways in which they are experienced and performed, are understood

as constructed from and constituted by the very sociohistorical world in which they have taken

shape.

In talking about the constructedness of race, Tukufu Zuberi argues that, because the

definition of race has changed over time, "to understand the impact of race one would need to

understand the impact and nature of these changes in the definition of race" (*White Logic* 6).

Given that race as a variable has not been conceptualized consistently over time, Zuberi contends

that comparing it over time is "in reality a comparison of the changing social meaning of race"

(6). Applying this to the study of ethnic identity, one must wonder: if the sociohistorical world is

changing, and if whatever is considered to be cultural is constantly on the move, then how

exactly can one determine what makes ethnic identity "stronger"? All ethnic subjects experience

their ethnic identity differently over time. Instead of trying to determine strength, we should

instead focus on understanding how it is *experienced* across contexts. Critical psychology makes

space for and stresses the importance of these kind of investigations in subjectivity.

Conclusion

> *In critical psychological research, we aim to open the possibility for working 'prefiguratively' – anticipating a better form of society in the very process of struggling for it. An emphasis on the prefigurative aspect of research draws attention to the way that all aspects of our everyday interaction and internal life world are embedded in social structures, and what happens in the 'personal' sphere is intimately connected with wider patterns of power and resistance.*
> —Ian Parker, "Critical Psychology: What It Is and What It Is Not"

Despite the problematic nature of psychology's investigations into ethnic identity strength, is it possible that the knowledge produced in psychological studies on ethnic identity using the *MEIM* may still be useful in some way? The answer is yes, absolutely. The *MEIM*, and much of the work psychology produces, always tells us something about the ways in which academics view the world at a specific moment in time and how they/we conceptualize constructs like ethnic identity. This is not to say that the work produced in psychology is not useful in other ways—there is no doubt that psychology, as a field, has a great deal of power. It is precisely for that reason, however, that I argue psychologists need to be more upfront about the degree of speculation that goes into their interpretation of findings.[84] Psychologists need to be especially transparent about their operationalization of constructs into variables when working with concepts as fluid and mutable as "culture" and "ethnic identity." Given psychology's spread, one could say that these descriptions can quickly become powerful prescriptions (supported by the authority of claims to "objectivity"). Psychologists working to understand constructs like ethnic identity need to be made aware of the dangers that come with trying to quantitatively "measure"—to break into concrete pieces—something so personal and variable.

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[84] One must wonder, at the same time, about the effect of being transparent. Would opening up about the constructed nature of knowledge production take away from psychology's power? There is no doubt that it is the authority of scientific objectivity that allows psychology to have the power it does in our society. Perhaps, then, it might be valuable for the scientific community *in general* to be more upfront about the constructed nature of data interpretation (i.e., to be upfront about the fact that numbers don't tell stories—people do). Viewing that constructedness as inherently tied to the scientific method, rather than trying to masquerade it under the guise of true empiricism, may allow psychology to explore theories and think about human subjectivity in ways it might not have otherwise done.

To attempt to measure ethnic identity, as I have shown, has meant trying to "fix" ethnic subjects and "hold them in place" (Parker "Critical Psychology" 13). Critical psychologists believe that "all research is action that works for or against power" and where there is power, there is resistance (Parker "Critical Psychology" 8). Psychologists with good intentions, who want their work to impact positive change, then, may want to think more critically about the implications of the measurements they use and how they function in the service of or against dominant narratives and power structures. Measurements like the *MEIM* do not exist outside of history—they are, as I and other critical psychologists have said, a part of it.

With that said, I cannot imagine a person who would dedicate their career to the study of ethnic identity without being someone who truly wants to effect positive change for marginalized communities. Positive intentions, however, do not exempt us from the possibility of hurting marginalized communities in some way. As psychology researchers, we need to critically examine our work and think about the extent to which they prescribe reductive and essentialist notions of identity. Critical psychologists "turn the gaze of the psychologist back on the discipline" (Parker "Critical Psychology" 1). I argue, however, that we need to *always* turn a critical gaze back onto ourselves and on our research (i.e., practice reflexivity). I admit freely that my work is not "apolitical"; it is, in fact, openly political, and I believe it *needs* to be. Indeed, as I covered earlier, critical psychologists have argued extensively against the alleged "neutrality" of the work produced in psychology. Still, why has psychology needed an entire subfield to emerge in order to even begin to concern itself with these issues? Why are psychology students not taught critical psychology in the United States? As I write this, there is only *one* graduate program in the *entire* United States that trains its students in critical psychology (which is, also, highly transparent about the fact that it produces politically engaged

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scholarship).[85] Psychology, in general, needs to adopt self-reflection as a common practice in the field. Ideally, there would be no divide between "mainstream psychology" and "critical psychology"—all work in psychology should be critical *from the start.*

By actively emphasizing "the transformative potential of research" (Teo "Philosophical Concerns" 46), critical psychology opens up ground for psychologists who wish to disrupt—rather than perpetuate—the status quo. In the next section, the conclusion to this thesis, I will review the major points I have covered and spend some time on a few unanswered questions. Most importantly, however, I want to situate readers into the current political moment—two months after the election of President Donald Trump—to highlight exactly *why* critical psychology and reflexivity are, right now, absolutely *vital* to any project in psychology that wishes to align itself with work in social justice.

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[85] The program that I am referring to is the Critical Social/Personality Psychology Program at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The program description states: "Critical Social/Personality Psychology has grown out of a long tradition of locally, critically, and politically engaged scholarship – a tradition embedded in the storied history of social psychology as social action, and in the activist ethos of New York City. We are a community of scholars whose work is rooted in a multiplicity of epistemological discourses, methodological tools, and interdisciplinary membranes that nourish human agency and ethical action" ("Critical Social/Personality Psychology").

—Conclusion—

PHDD: Psychology's Hermeneutic Deficit Disorder

> *The philosophers have only* interpreted *the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.*
> —Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach/Concerning Feuerbach"

> *For Foucault (1997), liberation is impossible because we are all trapped in the same game of oppression. Instead of trying to escape the game, we have the option to resist the rules of the game. Resistance then becomes a practice of freedom and includes such simple acts as saying 'no' to a rule presented to 'me'. According to Foucault, we can also resist in struggles against forms of ethnic, social, and religious domination; against forms of exploitation in the production sphere; and against the submission of subjectivity, which has become more prevalent in the West.*
> —Thomas Teo, "Theoretical Psychology: A Critical-Philosophical Outline of Core Issues"

> *To take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject; to deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments…and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct is not to negate or dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term, like the subject, to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized.*
> —Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'"

In the previous chapters, I have argued that psychology as a discipline sees itself and the knowledge it produces as existing outside of time and space. Chapter 1 showed us that measures of ethnic identity in psychology (such as Phinney's *MEIM*) operate by *prescribing* rather than *describing* their object of study. As a quantitative survey measure, the *MEIM* necessarily relies on essentialist views of what it means to be an ethnic subject such that that it is able to "capture" and "tame" the ever-growing and intimidating complexity of ethnic identity as a construct.[86] Complete with its own value judgments about the characteristics indicative (or, as Phinney says, the "essential elements") of a "stronger" kind of "ethnic-ness," the *MEIM* appears to coerce

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[86] This language of "capturing" and "taming" is reminiscent of what Rey Chow calls the "captivity narrative," prevalent in capitalist liberalism's politics of ethnicity ("Keeping Them" 95). On page 107, Chow tells us that it is precisely the process of coercive mimeticism that "holds together the fabric of this particular captivity narrative." Psychology, in its desire to "understand" ethnic subjects via its imposed constructions and categorizations of supposedly ethnic attributes, relies on coercive mimeticism in order to legitimize the validity of its own measures of ethnic identity. We see, then, how the language of "capturing" and "taming"—the captivity narrative—plays out in psychological research studies and how this kind of language mirrors what it is psychology, as it stands now, inadvertently ends up doing to ethnic subjects: caging them.

ethnic subjects into "replicat[ing] the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them," and, in doing so, leave them no other choice but to "authenticate the familiar imagings of them as ethnics" if they are to participate in these kinds of research studies (Chow "Keeping Them" 107). Psychology's conceptualizations of ethnic identity rely heavily on notions of "promotion," "achievement," and "strength," which, in this context, appear to be synonymous with "limiting," "flattening," and "prescribing." I want to emphasize that this is by no means an attack on the researchers who produce this kind of work (I always include myself when I speak of "psychological researchers"). Rather, it is an attempt to thoroughly question at least two of psychology's central theoretical insistencies: that it can and will study ethnic identity without concerning itself with history; power, and the sociocultural contexts in which we live, as if ethnic identity (or any kind of identity, for that matter) were constructed independent of dominant social structures. Psychology ultimately ends up participating in the very construction of ethnic identity that it aims to measure; those who do not fit into the proper mold end up plastered by psychology, falling out the sides and with big, pathological "F's" stamped on their foreheads.

Critical psychology, as I covered in chapter 2, can be thought of as providing a starting point for working through what I consider to be a socioculturally textured view of ethnic identity. It is, quite frankly, more open to listening to and working with scholarship emerging from other disciplines than psychology, which has been slow to incorporate other perspectives. Mainstream psychology, it appears, does not listen to the vast amount of scholarship produced outside of its own discipline.[87] In addition, and unlike mainstream psychology, critical psychology purposefully brings to light the historical constructedness of the theories and methodologies

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[87] Scholarship, that is, that isn't produced in the natural sciences (we already know psychology has a history of wanting to align itself with fields like biology and neuroscience). The kind of scholarship I am alluding to, instead, is that which is produced in the humanities and other social sciences (fields like sociology, cultural anthropology, literature, cultural and ethnic studies, education, and so on).

informing and guiding the work it produces. That is, critical psychologists recognize that every

theory is guided by a set of assumptions that are epistemically positioned in a particular way, or

that are always ideological in nature. Observations about social reality are viewed through

tainted lenses and, rather than pretend it has 20/20 vision, critical psychology acknowledges it is

difficult to see and asks for help through collective vision. By viewing subjectivity as "embedded

in historical and social contexts" (Teo "Philosophical Concerns" 40) and identity as

"constructed, negotiated and defended…in light of prevailing values and conventions" (Gough et

al. 161), critical psychology appears to provide possibilities beyond positivism for the study of

ethnic identity. Rather than see context, culture, and history as "other variables," Teo stresses

that these forces are "interwoven with the very fabric of personal identity" ("Philosophical

Concerns" 40). Mainstream psychology, then, must learn to rethink the theories and

methodologies it uses when studying ethnic identity, which is constituted by and always carries

with it residues of the social.

I should say here that one question I have not explored is whether critical psychology can

"go beyond" the sociocultural. Can critical psychology withstand the troubling of its notion of

the subject? Lacanian psychoanalysis, as I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, views

subjects as inherently split as a result of their inscription in the structure of language.[88] We know

that mainstream psychology has had a difficult relationship with Freud and psychoanalysis and,

it appears, with its conceptualization of ethnic identity. To think of a split ethnic subject is to

further complicate psychology's understanding of the psyche and, if critical psychology

considers the psyche as constituted by the social, what happens when the social is further

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[88] I have not made the space available in this section of the conclusion to provide a thorough explication of these Lacanian concepts, but I believe I have said enough such that the central gist of the point I want to make is clear. For more on Jacques Lacan, see: Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I;* Van Haute, *Against Adaptation;* Viego, *Dead Subjects.*

theorized as constituted by a linguistic structure riddled with gaps? In *Dead Subjects: Toward a Politics of Loss in Latino Studies,* Antonio Viego calls for critical ethnicity and race scholars to consider working using a Lacanian framework, which views subjects as already split rather than whole, transparent, or fully knowable. Interestingly, Ian Parker, a prominent figure in critical psychology who I have thoroughly cited throughout this thesis, is a Lacanian psychoanalyst (and President of the College of Psychoanalysts in the UK). In *Revolution in Psychology: Alienation to Emancipation,* Parker discusses Lacanian psychoanalysis and calls it an "intellectual prison" (176), asserting that Lacanian psychoanalysis stifles political action by taking Lacan's notion of "lack" to mean that "we should give up trying to change the world" (175).

In contradistinction, Yannis Stavrakakis, in "Locating the Lacanian Left," notes that the work of Lacan is "increasingly being used by major political theorists and philosophers associated with the Left" and traces the political Lacan, referring to his politics as an "anti-utopian radicalism" (1). Stavrakakis points out that from a Lacanian perspective, "theory should be thought of as a resource enabling us 'to accomplish a more radical gesture of 'traversing' the very fundamental fantasy' [that Slavoj Žižek believes is involved in 'action' as opposed to 'activity'], not only within clinical psychoanalysis, but 'even and also in politics'" (13). At the same time, Stavrakakis points to a potential wrench in these plans: the gap between theory and praxis reflects "a division internal to all of us…between our knowledge and our desire" (14). Returning to Parker's point, it is interesting to note that he does not connect his work in Lacanian psychoanalysis to critical psychology, which suggests the difficulty of working with Lacanian theory and finding ways to integrate it with the radical praxis inherent to critical psychology. As of now, it is difficult to say whether Lacanian psychoanalysis can find its way into critical psychology. One thing is clear, however: its view of subjects as fundamentally split has a lot to

offer critical psychology's theories regarding subjecthood, which currently do not appear to take

into consideration the influence of language as structure on the development of the subject.

On the topic of political action and critical psychology, in "From Speculation to

Epistemological Violence in Psychology a Critical Hermeneutic Reconstruction," Teo discusses

what he refers to as a "hermeneutic deficit" (which I have referenced in the title of this chapter)

in psychology:

> Methodological and epistemological problems surrounding the issue of
>
> interpretative speculations are neglected in empirical psychology and, thus,
>
> constitute important lacunae of the discipline. This *hermeneutic deficit* poses a
>
> threat to any concept of objectivity because it opens the door to ideological
>
> interpretations, to speculations that are meaningful within a *Zeitgeist* or to a
>
> subgroup, or to a consensus that is prone to temporal and spatial contingencies.
>
> Most importantly, this hermeneutic deficit discourages psychologists from
>
> reflecting upon the limitations of their own research.[89]

Teo points out that, in mainstream psychology, empirical research findings are often

taken as factual because they stem from data collected in controlled experiments and studies. The

problem that I mentioned in the previous chapter, however, is that data do *not speak for*

themselves; the knowledge presented in research articles contain "data *and* interpretive

speculations" (Teo "From Speculation" 51). Data, then, are necessarily understood through

speculative interpretation, resulting in what Teo calls a "hermeneutic surplus" (51). Every

empirical research paper in psychology includes a "discussion" section wherein researchers are

tasked with the interpretation of their data. As the 2016 recipient of the Jerome S. Bruner Award

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[89] Teo, "From Speculation to Epistemological Violence in Psychology a Critical Hermeneutic Reconstruction," 52, emphasis in original.

for Excellence in Undergraduate Research in the Psychology Department of the highest-ranking

college for a degree in psychology, one might have imagined that I would have received training

in what, in part, I was never explicitly taught: criteria for data interpretation. Nor did any of my

professors explicitly point out and delineate the implications of the subjective nature of data

interpretation.[90] Instead, I learned about the subjective nature of data interpretation by designing

my own independent study on critical psychology and digging for literature on this topic myself

through a completely different major at Duke: Global Cultural Studies in the Program in

Literature.

      If the allegedly "best" program for an undergraduate major in psychology in the United

States does not teach its students about the "speculative gap between theories and data" (Teo

"From Speculation" 53), it is no wonder why so many mainstream psychologists do not

acknowledge the historical constructedness of the work they do—they were never explicitly

taught to see empirical research as highly subjective (including findings from experimental

research studies which, we are taught, allow us to draw inferences about causality, and,

therefore, factual knowledge). This is thus, in part, a problem of *awareness* for many well-

intending researchers. Teo tells us that in *Theory and Experiment in Psychology: A Foundation-

Critical Study,* Klaus Holzkamp pointed out that "the interpretation of experimental results is

rather arbitrary," and that psychology does not actually have any criteria for determining the

soundness of interpretation ("From Speculation" 55).[91] What does it mean for psychology to

transmit the knowledge it produces as factual and empirical, especially now that it continues to

align itself with the "objectivity" of the natural sciences?

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[90] For information on the rankings of best colleges for a Psychology major, see: Cahill, "The 10 Best U.S. Colleges for a Major in Psychology."

[91] See: Holzkamp, *Theory and Experiment in Psychology: A Foundation-Critical Study.*

The authority psychology grants itself by positioning its work as "scientific" and thus "objective" while simultaneously making invisible its speculative elements, its "hermeneutic deficit," can have real and potentially dangerous implications. When psychology partakes in what Teo refers to as "epistemological violence" and presents "violent interpretations of data…as knowledge," and then transmits that knowledge to "the media, the public, and to students," there may be real consequences for historically oppressed and marginalized groups if the interpretations being circulated are *violent* in nature.[92] Teo describes speculative interpretations as epistemologically violent if they "implicitly or explicitly construct the 'Other' as problematic" or negatively impact the 'Other' in some way (57). It is worth repeating here what Hall et al. said in "Disciplinary Perspectives on Multicultural Research: Reply to Dvorakova (2016) and Yakushko et a. (2016)" in response to Yakushko et al.'s reference to Teo's notion of "epistemological violence": "particular research method[s] [do not] inherently contribute to 'epistemological violence.' Rather, it is the misguided application and/or interpretation of data generated from such methods that perpetuate oppression" (893). Indeed, Teo himself says that it is *interpretative speculations,* "(and not data!)," that can lead to epistemological violence ("From Speculation" 57). Teo also points out that an interpretative speculation can cause harm *regardless* of intentions and thus unbeknownst to psychologists with good intentions.

The most prototypical case of epistemological violence includes the way in which race psychologists have interpreted their findings regarding race and IQ. Though there is no evidence connecting racial genes and intelligent measures like IQ, some psychologists have interpreted

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[92] Teo notes that his term "epistemological violence" was influenced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "epistemic violence," which she coined in her famous piece, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"). The term "epistemological violence" is meant to "do justice to the methodological nature of the problem in the empirical sciences," which Spivak did not concern herself with in her postcolonial analysis ("From Speculation" 57).

data to suggest a "genetic speculation" between these psychological factors. In speculating that

"Blacks are genetically less intelligent than Whites," these psychologists have participated in

epistemological violence in that their violent speculations have led to concrete, negative

consequences for Blacks (including impacts on their self-perceptions and identity, the

expectations and attributions others have of and make about them, the degree of support they

experience at school, and the amount of funding that goes into certain preschool programs) (Teo

"From Speculation" 60).

A question thus emerges for this project: can one claim that Phinney's operationalization

of ethnic identity in the *MEIM* produces epistemological violence as Teo describes it? To answer

this question, allow me to detour to Latinx Studies scholar Leo Chavez's work on the "Latino

Threat Narrative." Describing the contents of this "Narrative," Chavez writes:

> The Latino Threat Narrative works so well and is so pervasive precisely because
>
> its basic premises are taken for granted as true. In this narrative, Latinos, whether
>
> immigrant or U.S.-born, are a homogeneous population that somehow stands
>
> apart from normal processes of historical change. They are immutable and
>
> impervious to the influences of the larger society and thus are not characterized as
>
> experiencing social and cultural change. They are uneducated, monolingual
>
> Spanish speakers, segregated into ethnic enclaves. Because they lead separate
>
> social and linguistic lives, one must assume that they marry only their own kind.
>
> They are locked into Catholic doctrine, leading to high fertility rates. In this
>
> narrative, Latinos, especially Mexican immigrants and their children, are seldom
>
> represented as agents of positive change, because their unwillingness to integrate
>
> denies them the opportunity to influence the larger society in any appreciable
>
> way, except in the negative—as a threat to existing institutions (e.g., education,

> social services, medical). In other words, the Latino Threat Narrative posits a neo-
>
> evolutionary scenario but in reverse, the devolution of society. Because of these
>
> characteristics, Latinos, especially those of Mexican origin, are said to be outside
>
> the practices of citizenship/subjectmaking and incapable of feelings of belonging.
>
> In this way, the Latino Threat Narrative constructs distinctions between citizens
>
> and noncitizens, elaborating a segmented citizenship in which some members of
>
> society are valued above others. Such differences, once constructed and
>
> normalized, rationalize and justify governmental practices and policies that
>
> stigmatize and punish certain categories of immigrants and their children.[93]

This striking paragraph on the Latino Threat Narrative, written by Chavez around 2008 and with

the post-9/11 United States in mind, could not be more chilling today, as I write this thesis. At

the start of his campaign, current President of the United States, Donald Trump, who by now has

been in office for about two months, stated, verbatim:

> "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not
>
> sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of
>
> problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs.
>
> They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.
>
> But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only
>
> makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They're sending us not the
>
> right people.
>
> It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin
>
> America, and it's coming probably -- probably -- from the Middle East. But we

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[93] Chavez, "The Latino Threat Narrative," 41-42.

don't know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don't

know what's happening. And it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast."[94]

Trump's speech epitomizes the Latino Threat Narrative as Chavez describes it. When Trump

defends his statements about Mexican immigrants being criminals and "rapists" by saying "…it

only makes common sense. It only makes common sense," he is attempting to naturalize his

xenophobic rhetoric through a kind of logic that, as Chavez puts it, "works so well and is so

pervasive precisely because its basic premises are taken for granted as true" (41). The blanket

statements Trump makes about Mexican immigrants (and then, of course, applies to Latinx

immigrants in general as well as those coming from the Middle East [obligatory post-9/11

xenophobic vitriol]) are precisely the kind of homogenizing claims that make up, in part, the

Latino Threat Narrative. Latinx immigrants (or "not the right people," according to Trump) are

viewed as "a threat to existing institutions" (Chavez 41), as dangerous "criminals" that White-

Americans need to be "protected" from (Washington Post Staff). The language of "us versus

them" is evident throughout Trump's speech, constructing differences between White-Americans

and Latinx immigrants that have become "normalized" to justify "governmental practices and

policies that stigmatize and punish certain categories of immigrants and their children" (Chavez

42). One such governmental practice or policy that Trump has been espousing throughout his

campaign and presidency (number one on his list) is the building of a wall along the border

between the United States and Mexico: "Number one, are you ready? Are you ready? We will

build a great wall along the southern border. And Mexico will pay for the wall" (Los Angeles

Times Staff).[95]

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[94] Washington Post Staff, "Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid."
[95] Los Angeles Times Staff. "Transcript: Donald Trump's full immigration speech, annotated."

Though the border wall ever-prominent in Trump's campaign speeches has yet to be built (because we're waiting for Mexico to "pay for [it]," of course), Trump's racist and xenophobic rhetoric has already been directly connected to innumerous acts of violence and hate against Latinxs. One example I can pull from my own research through a Duke Bass Connections interdisciplinary research team called "Schooling and Parenting: Implications for Students' Academic Identity." Soon after Trump's election, one 6th grade middle-schooler from a school district in the southeastern United States recounted an incident that occurred in her school between a White and a Latina student in an interview:

> Interviewer: Okay. Um, what about things…is there anything more recently? Maybe anything happening after the election?
>
> Student: Well, I know that, um, there are people who supported Donald Trump and one of them didn't really bug anyone about it. But there was another person who was very defensive of her views. *So one time someone had asked why she supported Donald Trump and she punched her in the face.* And everyone was really surprised by that – that was there. I wasn't there, but I know that it happened because some of my friends and other people who weren't my friend witnessed it. And she was suspended for a few days and she also outwardly supported some of his views about, uh, Hispanics, which made a lot of people uncomfortable.
>
> Interviewer: How do you know she outwardly supported him? What kinds of things did she say?

Student: Um, well, there was a time at lunch where she said that *they were*

bringing drugs into the country and, um, *they were committing crimes* and, uh,

yeah.[96]

The violent 6th grader's actions against a Latina student was clearly tied to her support of Donald

Trump and his rhetoric about Mexican immigrants as "criminals" who "bring crime." It is

important to note that this is by no means an isolated incident; several news outlets have reported

incidents where students have chanted "build that wall!" during lunch, "Trump won, you're going

back to Mexico," and "Build a wall," "No comprende" and "Speak English" during basketball

games.[97] Donald Trump's rhetoric has shown us that the real threat is how many Americans

think of Latinxs: as unchangeable, homogenous stereotypes.

Returning to the question I posed earlier: what can we say about Phinney's *MEIM?* Does

it participate in a kind of epistemological violence? The answer to these questions must be

thought of in light of the current historic moment, where the President of the United States

confidently employs the Latino Threat Narrative. If we think of Phinney's *MEIM* as depicting

ethnic subjects in a stereotypical and homogenizing way—which I argue it does—and we view it

alongside the context of our current political climate, where such conceptualizations of Latinx

immigrants are being used in the promotion of violence against them, then we can say that the

MEIM does, indeed, participate in epistemological violence. That is, the *MEIM* necessarily relies

upon essentialist, reductive notions of ethnic identity that view ethnic subjects as "immutable and

impervious to the influences of the larger society and thus…not characterized as experiencing

social and cultural change" (Chavez 41). Think back, for example, to the way in which the

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[96] Student 0541, emphasis added.
[97] Berenson, "Middle Schoolers in Michigan Chant 'Build That Wall' After Trump Victory"; Wallace and LaMotte, "Harassment in schools skyrockets after election, teachers report"; Cuevas, "'Trump' as anti-Latino epithet: Ugly incidents at high school games." See also Whack and Reeves, "Schools report racist incidents in wake of Trump election."

MEIM was used in Mroczkowski and Sánchez's "The Role of Racial Discrimination in the

Economic Value of Education Among Urban, Low-Income Latina/o Youth: Ethnic Identity and

Gender as Moderators." There, we saw how, for example, the lack of an ideological adherence to

the concept of the EVE was a problem researchers located within students' views of their ethnic

identity—a "problem" that could be solved by adjusting students' self-perceptions and degrees of

recognizable "ethnic-ness" (according to the *MEIM*)—rather than a reflection of "the influences

of the larger society" (Chavez 41). What we see in Mroczkowski and Sánchez's interpretation of

their data are what Teo calls a kind of "hermeneutic deficit," which is further compounded by the

speculative problematics in the operationalizing of ethnic identity as a variable in the *MEIM*. The

times are changing, and the way we think about ethnic identity in psychology needs to change,

too. Ethnic identity must be conceptualized in such a way as to allow for its mutability, historical

constructedness, and relationship to the sociocultural context to be made explicit.

The work I am doing in this thesis can be thought of as trying to interrupt the Latino

Threat Narrative in psychology and, so, I return to the concept of "reflexivity" mentioned in the

introduction to this thesis and in chapter 2. It has become clear that researchers in psychology,

though often well-meaning, can perpetuate epistemological violence in their work. Epistemology

and ethics, then, "might not be distinct categories," but, rather, "belong together," opening up

possibilities for psychological researchers to engage in "epistemological ethics" (Teo "From

Speculation" 60). Those of us working in (and against) psychology need to be scrupulously

aware of and when we are perpetuating something like the Latino Threat Narrative, however

implicitly and subtly that may be. We have an epistemological responsibility to consider the

impact our operationalization of variables and interpretations of data may have on historically

marginalized groups. In other words, we have a responsibility to practice reflexivity in our work,

and to think critically about how and why our constructs and data are produced and interpreted.

Mainstream psychology has much to learn from critical psychology, beginning with actually

listening.

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Appendix

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

The MEIM was originally published in the following article:

Phinney, J. (1992). The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure: A new scale for use with
      adolescents and young adults from diverse groups. <u>Journal of Adolescent Research</u>, <u>7</u>,
      156-176.

      It has subsequently been used in dozens of studies and has consistently shown good
reliability, typically with alphas above .80 across a wide range of ethnic groups and ages. On the
basis of recent work, including a factor analysis of a large sample of adolescents*, it appears that
the measure can best be thought of as comprising two factors, ethnic identity search (a
developmental and cognitive component) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment (an
affective component). Two items have been dropped and a few minor modifications have been
made. Attached is the current revision of the measure, without the measure of Other-group
orientation. The two factors, with this version, are as follows: ethnic identity search, items 1, 2,
4, 8, and 10; affirmation, belonging, and commitment, items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12. (None of the
items are reversed.) The preferred scoring is to use the mean of the item scores; that is, the mean
of the 12 items for an over-all score, and, if desired, the mean of the 5 items for search and the 7
items for affirmation. Thus the range of scores is from 1 to 4.
      The suggested ethnic group names in the first paragraph can be adapted to particular
populations. Items 13, 14, and 15 are used only for purposes of identification and categorization
by ethnicity.
      The Other-group orientation scale, which was developed with the original MEIM, is not
included, as it is considered to be a separate construct. It can, of course, be used in conjunction
with the MEIM.
      Translations of the measure into Spanish and French now exist and are available, but we
currently have no information on their reliability.
      No written permission is required for use of the measure. However, if you decide to use
the measure, please send me a summary of the results and a copy of any papers or publications
that result from the study.

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*Roberts, R., Phinney, J., Masse, L., Chen, Y., Roberts, C., & Romero, A. (1999). The structure
      of ethnic identity in young adolescents from diverse ethnocultural groups. <u>Journal of
      Early Adolescence</u>, <u>19</u>, 301-322.

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or <u>ethnic groups</u> that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree   (3) Agree   (2) Disagree   (1) Strongly disagree

1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as
        its history, traditions, and customs.
2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members
        of my own ethnic group.
3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked
        to other people about my ethnic group.
9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food,
        music, or customs.
11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

13- My ethnicity is
        (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
        (2) Black or African American
        (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
        (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
        (5) American Indian/Native American
        (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
        (7) Other (write in): _____

14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)
15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)