

# **Finding a Box for the Multicultural**

**The Power of Language and the Overcoming  
Strengths of the Multicultural**

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By

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# INTRODUCTION

## WHERE MY RESEARCH BEGAN: THE RACE CARD

Typically, “pulling the race card” has a negative connotation, implying someone has just attempted to blame a particular occurrence or treatment on their racial background. Yet, as I sat in Reynolds Theater in January of 2012, this phrase gained new meaning. Michelle Norris, the host of the National Public Radio (NPR) station’s evening programming “All Things Considered,” was standing on the stage, ending her talk at Duke University with a personal twist on the act of pulling a race card. Two years prior to this event, the renowned speaker invited citizens across the country to summarize what race meant to them on what she entitled “Race Cards.” The cards could be submitted at events, through the mail or on the Internet. Since Norris’s Race Card campaign began, thousands of people shared their thoughts with the world in powerful six-word phrases. Of the cards the NPR speaker shared that day, one resonated with me more than the others: “My son is double, not half.”

As a woman with an African American mother and a Puerto Rican father, as soon as I heard this quote, I began to interpret its words for myself. As long as I can remember, if anyone asked me “what” I was, I replied “half Puerto Rican and half Black” or simply “Black and Puerto Rican.” Yet, the word “half” infers incompleteness, only a portion of a whole. Instead, the word “double” suggests being not only whole, but composed of two complete entities and more than either of those units by itself. Pondering the significance of those words in regards to my upbringing, I agreed that my parents’ background made me Puerto Rican and African American but their union within me made me more than either of those labels could embody. *I am double.* I fell so in love with the idea that I began to wonder why I had never thought of using “double”

before that moment. I began to wonder what words individuals with similar mixed cultural backgrounds use to identify themselves and why.

In my analysis of language and identity, I ventured further to examine my preference for defining myself as Black rather than African American. While visiting Puerto Rico, I observed that many Puerto Ricans fit my definition of blackness based on phenotype, yet they did not share the traditions of African Americans. Accordingly, identifying as Black and Puerto Rican does not necessarily relay the cultural differences in my family that I want to communicate whenever my race or culture comes into discussion. Saying that I am “African American and Puerto Rican” would more accurately impart that message, but identifying in this way requires a conscious effort. The author of the Race Card questioning being “double” versus “half” made me start asking myself why. Why did I say Black and not African American? Why do others use particular racial or cultural categories for themselves and not others, and why was the idea of being “double” so revolutionary to me? Why had the term not been used before to identify individuals of mixed cultural background? Countless questions circulated through my mind.

Before hearing that Race Card, I did not consider the investigation of my identity and the identity of others of similar backgrounds to be one of my research interests. Multicultural was simply who I was, not a scholastic topic of concern. Being multicultural was a consistent, unwavering part of my life that I had come to love. I loved the freedom my background allotted me. I could listen to both Rap and Rhythm and Blues one day and dance to Reggaetone and Bachata the next without someone looking at me inquiringly. In addition, I appreciated the complexity of the people around me. I never wanted to say that the friends I made shared my beliefs and interests; I wanted to be exposed to the diversity of the world through not only my family but my peers. When I chose to study Cultural Anthropology during my time at Duke

University, my interest in diversity and culture spewed over into my academic interests. Then came this moment, during my junior year, when I began to question how I had formulated my identity, why I had not thought of calling myself “double” and how I feel about my background. Thus, my research began. I began to read about topics of racial and cultural identity, focusing on the quote that intrigued me and honed my interests to one group: the multicultural.

### **METHODOLOGY: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

To answer all of my research questions, I wanted to analyze previous scholarly work on the culturally mixed but, most importantly, I wanted to speak to fellow students who had to answer similar questions for themselves at some point in their lives. Speaking to multicultural students would provide primary explanations and information about how and why youth of different cultural backgrounds identify themselves in particular ways. The fourteen Duke undergraduates to whom I spoke may not have the vast expertise of scholars in this field, but the testimony of someone who actually lives the life one wants to understand is both credible and invaluable. Scholarly works would provide the basis for analyzing the factors that arise during my interviews, but the conversations themselves are the means of truly understanding the life of the multicultural and their sense of self.

In my interviews with undergraduates, I asked eleven main questions, beginning with the infamous question “What are you?” followed by with inquiries into the students’ home, family relationships, interactions with peers before and during their undergraduate career at Duke University, their self-categorization versus others’, and ending with inquiries about how these factors affected the formulation of their identity. The interviews were conversational in format rather than a formal session of question-and-answer, but I made sure all of my questions were

answered by the end of each interview. As a result of this format, many other questions and points of clarification arose during the interviews, making every dialogue unique.

The students with whom I conversed represent groups across the cultural and multicultural spectrum, from African American and Caucasian to West Indian, Brazilian, Iraqi, Filipino, African and of Latino descent. Their places of origin span from California to South Carolina, to the island of Mozambique and the nation of France. I wanted the students that I interviewed to be as diverse as possible. Being of mixed cultural background signifies the coming together of various ways of life and values in one being, and I wanted my research project and its primary sources to represent the breadth such unities can incorporate by featuring as much of that spread as I could. What I seek to understand about multicultural identity and the language we use to identify ourselves does not apply to only one group of people, such as the diversity of the Black race mixed with the span of the White or the Hispanic. Thus, my interviewees should not either.

The only common trait that I wanted my interviewees to obtain was the fact that their parents were not from the same cultural backgrounds, and the students with whom I spoke demonstrate the realization of that desire. The first student I interviewed, Sydney, came to Duke on a football scholarship from South Carolina. His southern roots greatly influenced his life experiences, but having a “Black” mother and a “Dominican” father equally swayed the road he took in life.<sup>1</sup> Living in the Dominican Republic at a young age with his paternal family before returning to the United States exposed Sydney to socioeconomic and cultural diversity that laid the foundation for his ideologies on life (Interview, September 6, 2012). Christian, a self-identified “biracial” man with a “Black” mother and a “White” father, hailed from “SOCAL”—

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<sup>1</sup> As I introduce my interviewees, the labels I use are placed in quotation, demarcating my effort to use the language that the students used themselves throughout the introduction. As my goal is to understand the language that students use to self-identify, using the actual word choice of the undergraduates is integral.

Southern California—and had to adjust to the Southern culture and beliefs that he believed greatly impacted Duke’s culture (Interview, September 6, 2012). Deja moved from New York to Arizona at the age of fourteen before she found herself on Duke’s premises. Identifying as “Black and White” with a “Black” father and a “White” mother, her change in location not only impacted the way her peers interpreted her ambiguous looks but also the way she thought she was being interpreted as a person of mixed descent (Interview, September 7, 2012).

Five students that I interviewed—Miurel, Segun, Sarah, Anthony and David—all shared interesting perspectives about being Black and what that signified. “Panamanian and Black” student Miurel, originally from North Carolina, shared her struggle to obtain her Black peers and family’s acceptance, when many (in her eyes) “acted Black” in stereotypical ways (Interview, September 8, 2012). In Segun’s Oregon home, he felt as if someone looked Black, they were deemed Black, without any further proof or explanation being necessary. Not until he arrived to Duke did the fact that he is “only Halffrican” (Half African, particularly Nigerian, and half White) seem significant to his peers (Interview, September 23, 2012). Back in her home in a more southeastern region of the nation, Sarah similarly identified herself as simply “Black” whenever prompted with the question “What are you?” Unlike Segun who had his background emphasized for him, not until she arrived to Duke did she choose to specify that her mother is Antiguan and her father is Jamaican due to the behavioral and cultural associations she felt others made with the label “Black” (Interview, September 8, 2012). New Yorker Anthony similarly felt that, on Duke’s campus, every man and woman within a certain range of skin color was deemed “Black” without any consideration for their cultural roots. Having a Jamaican mother and a Costa Rican father greatly influenced Anthony’s life, but he became accustomed to being seen as simply Black (Interview, September 28, 2012).

David shared similar beliefs about the associations made about Black Americans, calling himself a “person who just happens to be black” because he did not fit those stereotypes (Interview, September 9, 2012). When I first asked the question “What are you?” this student from the Maryland region specified that he was “three-fourths Black and one-fourth White” but stated that he usually identifies himself as “Black and mixed.” Having a “mixed,” White and Black mother and a Black father, David was the only student that I interviewed who identified this way, seeing his mixed identity as its own separate entity in addition to a racial label. He was also the only student whose family would be placed predominantly into one cultural or racial group. However, the pattern he used to describe himself—“this and that”—still follow the similar motif of separately listing the backgrounds of each of the students’ parents.

Two of the undergraduates with whom I spoke had parents with unique cultural backgrounds. Texan Cameron came to Duke from a diverse high school and family. Having a “Black and Puerto Rican” father and a “Japanese and Creole” mother, Cameron found his equivocal appearance to be an asset, allowing him to adapt to whomever was around him, whether that adaptation was positive or negative (Interview, September 9, 2012). In her southeastern home state, Jessica’s family represented more cultural diversity than simply stating her parents’ nationalities could demonstrate. Her father is Iraqi and Brazilian but was raised amongst people of the West Indian culture, in the continental, Caribbean country of Guyana. As political refugees, her father’s family traveled from Brazil to Guyana seeking refuge. Her mother (from the Philippines) is part Spanish and Filipino, with a Filipino mother and a Spanish father. Identifying herself as “multicultural” was the simplest approach for this student to take. Coming from a Catholic school where she felt students did not understand “being more than just White,”

Duke allowed this student to view her multicultural identity from a new vantage point (Interview, September 11, 2012).

For my interviewees Sophia and Lizete, just being in the United States required adjustments. Sophia was born and raised in the Middle East and identified as “multiracial.” Her French father and Kenyan mother moved to the small island of Bahrain, located between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as expatriates before Sophia was born. With the majority of the population being expatriates from other countries, cultural diversity had always surrounded Sophia throughout her upbringing. Living in Paris with her grandparents from the age of fourteen to eighteen further developed her independence and cultural awareness to the point that she decided to attend a university in the United States (Interview, September 16, 2012). Lizete came from an equally diverse background. Lizete was from Mozambique, a country in Southeast Africa. As a past colony of Portugal, the people of this nation speak Portuguese. Her mother had both “Black,” African heritage through Lizete’s grandfather and “White,” Portuguese family members. While she identified her father’s family as more “White” and Portuguese, this student’s father himself grew up in Angola, another past Portuguese colony in Africa. To Lizete, her family symbolized the essence of being “multicultural” and not being able to identify with any one category. Not only was she “Mozambiquen and Portuguese,” Lizete identified with a category distinct to South Africa: “coloured” (Interview, September 21, 2012).

My other two interviewees—Andrew and Maria—further diversified the viewpoints that I was able to obtain from my interviews. Andrew (who identified as “half white, half Filipino” or “half Asian” with anyone who was unfamiliar with the Filipino culture) was born and raised in a southern state and thought his southern roots combined with his mixed background heavily influenced his life experiences and beliefs (Interview, September 10, 2012). “Mexican and

White” student, Maria, lived part of her life in Mid-eastern United States and in Mexico with her Mexican mother and white father and her siblings. While being “Mexican” and “White” American was a part of her identity, Maria felt boggled by the idea that having such a background would make her interesting enough to warrant an interview (Interview, October 1, 2012).

Alissa King’s words in *Biracial and Multiracial Students* sheds light on the significance of studying multicultural identity:

Identity is the ultimate act of creativity... [It] represents knowing who we are in the context of all that we might be [and it] is what we make of ourselves within a society that is making something of us. (King 2008: 33-34).

In a world where much is assumed from first appearances, where factors individuals do not control pull at the strings of their being from the moment they are born, self-identity is one of few choices human beings can make to establish their place among the wide spectrum of cultures in the United States. With over 6.8 million residents in the United States of America identifying with more than one ethnic group, with the world becoming more and more globalized and fused across cultural and racial lines, the comprehension of how such people categorize themselves will illustrate the position they *want* in the United States, not simply the stance they have (Humes 2011: 4). As their numbers expand, understanding the ethnically mixed of the United States will only become more pertinent.

## **REFINING MY LANGUAGE**

Some of the students that I interviewed had parents who affiliated with two different cultures themselves, leading them to identify with four different cultural groups. Some students identified as multiracial or biracial. Others had parents who would be affiliated with the same race but were culturally mixed, such as Sarah who identified as Black racially but had parents from two different Caribbean countries, making her multicultural but not multiracial. Based on the diversity of the students I interviewed, I needed to choose one term to unify all the students I interviewed for the point of analysis.

My research interest began with a twist on language that intrigued me enough to examine the language that other students of mixed cultural backgrounds use to classify themselves. Word choice as my study's trigger highlighted one fact: language is power. The foundation for the ability to identify oneself is the assumption that differences between the self and others exist. Without this presumption, defining the "self" versus the "other" would not be possible. Decisions on the linguistic norms for identifying oneself are where language and power intertwine (Wodak 2012: 216). Authority figures within our society manipulate what language we use. Those dominant figureheads may vary for the individual, encompassing his or her parents, family, school, church, politicians, musicians or other notable people in his or her life, but their impact on the words we use are certain. With their influence contributing to an individual's sense of self, electing a unifying term based on my interpretation of the bases of their diversity rather than adhering to commonly used terms is fundamental to this project. Determining this foundational label allowed me to establish a bond between all of my interviewees, justifying their joint analysis within this research endeavor. Based on my research and interviews, I will refer to my interviewees as "multicultural" versus "biracial" or

“multiracial” because this term applies to all of my interviewees, even those who identify themselves in terms of racial differences, such as Black or White.

I chose the term “multicultural” to characterize all of the students I interviewed due to the fact that many of the characteristics that differentiated the undergraduates’ maternal and paternal families were often culturally-based rather than racially-based. For example, all eight of the students I interviewed who identified as partially or all Black referenced the idea of “acting Black” at some point during their interview. The details they associated with being Black dealt with stereotypical dress, attitudes, and behavior of the Black population in the United States. While the students were associating these attributes to a racial label, qualities such as mannerisms and beliefs are academically seen as characteristics of a *culture*, not a race, with race often being defined based on phenotype.<sup>2</sup> Frequently, whenever my interviewees mentioned “race,” what they were delineating as differences between their “races” were cultural. Consequently, my analysis will focus on the cultural identity of my interviewees rather than their racial identity.

### **DU BOIS, CHIONG, SPENCER AND PUTNAM AND THE FORMULATION OF MY FINAL QUESTIONS**

While my ethnographic approach would provide first-hand perspectives of being from mixed cultural background, the use of scholarly works would still be necessary to establish a base upon which to analyze and compare what my interviews revealed. When I began reading previous scholarly works that discussed multicultural identity, I encountered significant arguments from

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<sup>2</sup> I used *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture* (2003) for definitions of “culture” and “race” that will be used in this project. According to dictionary, as of 1993, race has been associated with “phenotypical features” (243). Culture “describes the shared customs, values and beliefs which characterize a given social group, and which are passed down from generation to generation” (62). Thus, although some of my interviewees used racial and cultural labels interchangeably, mannerisms, values, and ways of thinking are academically characteristic of culture, not race. This is why “multicultural” is used as the unifying label for all of my interviewees, emphasizing cultural differences over racial differences.

three scholars, W.E.B Du Bois, Jane Chiong, and Rainer Spencer. Their works revealed three different responses to the question “what are you”: complete acceptance of strict differences between groups, pride in multiculturalism, or inquiry into the need for labels at all.

In his work *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903) contemplates the perplexities of individuals with a “double consciousness”—two societal or cultural sets of ideals and values encased in one body. He discusses the phenomenon as if it were a source of conflict leading to an “identity crisis.” In her piece *Racial Categorization of Multiracial Children in Schools*, Founder and Director of the Multiracial Family Network Chiong (1998) acknowledges that such theories about “conflict” for the culturally diverse are common in academic works about the multicultural. However, by saying they are based on ideals of “racial purity” and arguing that such individuals can actually find strength in their multiculturalism, this scholar and activist refutes such claims. On the other hand, the work of professor and author Spencer, entitled *Challenging Multiracial Identity* (2006), questions all works about “multiracial identity,” denouncing the generalizations that other works make and questioning the mere existence of the category and its negative impact on minority groups.

All of these works helped position my project within the field of numerous theories surrounding multiculturalism. After reading about the “identity crisis” that people with families from different backgrounds potentially face, I started to wonder what issues (if any) other mixed undergraduates actually encounter and what was the basis for those conflicts if they exist. If I did not find issues with identity amongst the students, I would need to find the actual common thread between the students I interview if the crisis of the “double consciousness” was not it. Thus, despite my holistic, confident interest point for my project, my questions started to surround ideas of conflict. Nevertheless, once I started conducting my interviews, I noticed that the shared,

underlying theme in the lives of the students I interviewed was not solely internal dilemmas but external influences as well.

While evidence of the “internal conflicts” did not present itself in all of my interviews as Du Bois’ work suggested, I did see some evidence of tension between students and the expectations and beliefs of the people in their lives. However, my interviewees’ tensions did not spring from conflicting beliefs within their paternal and maternal families but from associations and assumptions that contradicted who they truly were. They would often feel pressured to live by those clashing standards. Despite this, rather than dwelling on the perplexities of their identities, the students embraced their cultural blends for the opportunity they presented: the chance to become a more culturally aware and broad-minded human being.

By highlighting such assets over weaknesses, my interview with Andrew re-shifted my analysis from ideas of conflict back to motifs of strength and positivity in regards to being multicultural. At the end of every interview, I asked if there was anything that the interviewee wanted to add or if there was anything that he or she wished I had asked during the discussion. Andrew’s reply actually challenged me. After a long, a ten-second pause to think about my question, he stated:

*It seemed as if [pause] maybe your questions were asking [pause] conflict questions like what areas of conflict and I think...there’s more to be done on positives and I feel that’s something multicultural people get a lot, just a lot of the negatives...don’t harp so much on how the person might be called out for. . . certain stereotypes and never give the person space enough to own up to the the richer parts of that person’s heritage . . . I think that’s one of the things that I*

*didn't see...how has being multicultural allowed you to own more. It's more proactive...* (Interview, Original Emphasis, September 10, 2012)

This was just one of the many significant moments I encountered during my interview with Andrew. I appreciated the challenge because it forced me to reconsider the focus of my thesis.

My literary research re-formulated my questions, and in that research, the fact that being multicultural could create conflict was emphasized. As a result, my questions focused on potential sources of controversy such as family, peers, societal ideals, and government. However, stressing issues was not my initial goal. This project began with the empowering principle of being double. From this idea, I wanted to examine what I uncovered from actual multicultural youth, particularly at Duke University, to isolate factors that impact identity creation and verbalization, whether those factors were positive or negative.

Reflecting back to this initial desire, an important phrase from Andrew's testimony is the ability of the multicultural to "own more," as if multiculturalism had its own capital to be obtained. Political scientist Robert D. Putnam's work on social capital demonstrates how attributes of a community, such as the multicultural, could become resources for the people within its network (Putnam 2000). As a woman from a culturally diverse background, I can understand how multiculturalism could become an asset.

Personally, I always love being mixed. I love being *both* Puerto Rican and African American because of how both cultures have contributed to the person I am today. As a result, I am always quick to push towards the middle ground, emphasizing both components of my heritage whenever I feel as if someone is trying to box me within the confines of one label or the other. However, this is not always the case. Not every individual finds comfort or benefits in his or her diverse family background. Some individuals, such as Maria, will not find their

multicultural background worth discussion. Acknowledging that different life experiences will affect how people navigate their environment and formulate their identity, what I want my research to reveal are the commonalities amongst the culturally diverse, and those similarities appeared more as strengths and capital than as disadvantages and burdens.

### **THEMES, THEIR SEQUENCE AND CONNECTIONS**

As I conducted my interviews, five main themes materialized from answers to my questions: political influences on terms of cultural identity, the White population as “cultureless,” the notion of “authenticity” and “belonging,” the benefits of being multicultural, and the navigation and perception of Duke as a multicultural undergraduate. The establishment of these main themes determined the order of this thesis project. In the first chapter, I will provide background information on the social and political history of the racial and cultural labels used in present-day United States. The information provided will explore the first three themes by showing how politics create finite labels and characteristics for minority groups while leaving the dominant, White group as presumably “cultureless,” establishing expectations for minority groups that the “cultureless” majority do not have. Providing the history and stereotypes of the racial and cultural categories used in the United States will be integral to this project because they are the source of the conflicts that I uncovered throughout my interviews. Their presumptions cause the discrepancies between the students’ self-identify and their identification from others.

The second chapter extends the analysis of racial and cultural categories in the United States to the multicultural, revealing the history of multicultural movements and multicultural identity in this nation. Reviewing the categories that are used in the United States in the first

chapter reveals the established, accepted language for identity in the United States, allowing the second chapter to closely analyze the way not having their own category or “box” impacts the multicultural. The latter portion of this chapter analyzes the environment at Duke’s influence on how undergraduate multicultural students identify themselves. As my field site, analyzing the cultural environment on Duke’s campus is important. Being an elite school located in Southeastern United States, Duke’s history and atmosphere impacted the way some students perceived their backgrounds and vice versa. Some of the interviewees view Duke as an accepting space, full of diversity and openness and lacking judgment. On the opposite end, others think Duke encompasses one of the most naturally segregating environments they had ever encountered. The reasons behind stark differences in images of this renowned institution resulted from a “regional effect,” dependent on the origins of the students themselves. Thus, Duke revealed itself to be a small microcosm of the cultural and racial ideologies introduced in these first two chapters. In addition, the presence of cultural and racial ignorance in its structure of academic excellence made my field site distinctive.

In the final chapter, I will analyze the manner in which the students I interviewed maintained a positive attitude toward their diversity despite the stream of potential conflict shown in the previous chapters. Not until after my interview with Andrew did I begin to explicitly ask the students I interviewed about what they saw as positive about their cultural diversity. Yet, the majority of my interviewees mentioned strengths due to their multicultural identity that boiled down to two main categories: resilience and cultural awareness or acceptance.

Based on my interviews with students at Duke University, despite their diverse upbringings, despite the wide spectrum of their cultures, counter to Du Bois’s claims, the only

problem facing the multicultural was pressure to adhere to stringent standards that did not allot for their cultural diversity. The majority of the students I interviewed did not demonstrate any current conflicts with their identities, and for the few who did, history of being told they were “different” had played its toll on their psyche. While Deja did demonstrate the struggle that can come from not having one cultural home, such feelings did not materialize until peers emphasized just how different she looked from her Caucasian mother, a realization that greatly troubled her. While Segun never had issues with his identity personally—accepting his Nigerian roots in Nigeria, American home and his phenotypical “Blackness”—when he arrived to Duke University, the level of importance his African and African American peers granted his being “only half” perplexed him.

Despite being denied the implementations of the power of language on a national level and being pressured to think and behave in a pre-categorized fashion, the students I interviewed showed strength and cultural understanding in the face of their slow-to-change environment. Pressures that began because of their environment and maneuvered their way within were the common source of conflict for my interviewees, validating the need to rethink the implications that current categories of race and culture impose on the population of the United States, particularly its minority groups. Establishing nationally-recognized language for the multicultural would grant recognition and power to its growing population. However, this thesis does not argue for the creation of a multicultural “box” in which the culturally diverse can be placed. Through their use of accepted labels, my interviewees’ desire to be recognized and seen as “normal” is evident. However, the strength of the multicultural lies in their defiance of the actual *need* for an accepted label.

Labels and their characteristics created their challenges. Thus, my interviews show that the multicultural may have wanted a label, but only because accepted categories suggest normalcy, and not many individuals want to be seen as “other.” However, not having their own classification exposed the drawback of conventional boxes for humanity: restriction and loss of individuality. The multicultural reveal the solution: the recognition of the limitations of established categories and the acceptance of the complexity of the human population. Being multicultural allows such individuals to realize this solution, granting them the ability to see the individual rather than the group, unlike so many of the people who appeared in their lives. Through the bridging of their social capital across cultural divides, the multicultural recognize that no one truly “fits” a label, relinquishing their need to have an established language for identification of their own.

# CHAPTER ONE

## WHAT ARE YOU? WHAT AM I?:

### THE HISTORY AND IMPLICATIONS OF RACE AND CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

#### CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

To discuss the origins of the notion of “race” and “culture” in the United States is a daunting task for any scholar. While understanding such concepts is essential to my project, the way I think and the way I define the terms I use to characterize the students I interview is not always reflective of how my interviewees think of themselves. This is the dilemma of *emic* versus *etic* that every anthropologist faces. *Emic* knowledge and understanding come from within the culture itself; *etic*, presupposes that a cultural group can be researched through established categories that “can be applied to all cultures in the search for cultural universals,” as if universal truths exist within every cultural group (Jackson and Hogg 2010: 264).

I encountered *emic* understanding that conflicted with my own when I asked the student Sydney how he defined “race” versus “culture.” He answered quite eloquently with a reference to the Dominican “race,” stating his belief that race “is the people” (Interview, September 6, 2012). Whether they are “half, quarter, full,” to him, it was the “people that make up being Dominican.” Accordingly, while scholars as Bolaffi et al. (the authors of the *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*) would accept interpreting “race” as characterizing a specific group of people (*etic*), equating a *nationality* of people with a “race of people” is not common practice academically. Since the nineteenth century, categorizing “races” has largely been based on phenotypes (Bolaffi et al 2003:243). However, Sydney’s statements suggest that individuals of

the same “race” have a far deeper connection than the way they look—as if essential values existed within a certain race.

Once he admitted he was not sure how to define race, Sydney resorted to using words that suggested he did see the differences within people of the “Dominican race, mentioning the Black, Indian, and other roots grounded in the Dominican Republic. After reconsideration, he concluded, “You can’t...separate everybody into different categories” because “nobody’s full anything anymore and you can’t take that away” (Interview, September 6, 2012). I found myself agreeing. You cannot force everyone into a neat, pre-defined box. The global population is diverse and is only becoming more intermingled with each passing day, and I too believe that not everyone will fit within the cultural and racial lines that society has created because they are *societal*, not natural nor finite in their structure or boundaries.

We do, however, live in a society where racial and cultural categories are widely used and accepted without hesitation. Consequently, the feat of analyzing the history or “race” and “culture” must still be tackled. When asked the question, “What are you?” the interviewed students generally used categories that were commonplace and customary. When someone defined himself or herself with anything other than a pre-established stamping that they had previously been taught, the label was only seen as a joke in their eyes, not something they felt as if they could actually own. For example, when Nigerian and White Segun identified himself as “Halfrican,” he immediately laughed, and I laughed as well (Interview, September 23, 2012). Thankfully, he did not take offense to my laughter since he meant for it to be a joke, but the fact that we both felt the urge to laugh at such a label demands analysis. When I asked him why he laughed, why he did not see “Halfrican” as a legitimate means of identifying himself, he stated that it was because he “could not check it in a box” (Interview, September 23, 2012). Thus, the

governmental officials, school administration, medical and academic surveyors and other power holders who choose the options provided on any document that requests the selection of one's ethnic or racial category determine the characterizations we deem reasonable to define ourselves.

Ideas of “class,” “race,” and “culture” are used every day, sometimes interchangeably. Therefore, if I am going to tackle the task of discussing the commonalities amongst multicultural people, not only must I examine the common definitions of “culture” and “race,” but I also must investigate the origins of these terms and the culmination of their power and influence. Without the acceptance of their meanings, differences between the “multicultural” and the alleged “pure” racially and culturally would not be such an interesting topic to explore. The multicultural would not appear to be stuck in a liminal state of being, juxtaposed between established categories without fully fitting any (Turner 1964).

As an anthropologist I should consider all of the perspectives of the labels that my interviewees use, but some scholarly distinction between the terms does need to be established to create a platform on which the interviews will be discussed. Every discussion I have had in which race and culture were integral has been interesting, but I have seen clear divergent interpretations. For example, one of my interviewees who identified as half Black appeared to have self-internalized some of the stereotypes about being Black. Miurel frequently associated the words “ghetto” and “ratchet”—oppositional behaviors to the “norm”—with her black peers in high school, stating she was often seen as more White because of her dedication to school and her style of clothes (Interview, September 8, 2012). While Miurel considered her peers’ “ghetto” behavior and dress to be traits of “Blackness,” they were really reflective of the class and economic status of the students to whom she was referring. Although she did not consider this

herself, she did state the basis for the differences she saw when she casually described the dangerous, impoverished neighborhood of her black friends.

Such stereotypical associations as Miurel's and linguistic confusion as Sydney's assert the need to explicitly discuss the origins of the terms "race" and "culture." Although my interviewees may not have viewed race and culture in the way I will in this project, surveying the role and meaning of these terms will help put their views into context. Examining the terms will help clarify the means that today's ideas of race and culture came to be and the way they became influential components of identity in the eyes of my interviewees and myself.

#### **THE HISTORY AND INFLUENCE OF RACE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Since I was born and raised in the United States into the "American" way of thinking, the existence of a "pre-racial" world is unfathomable. Although the biological basis for race has been refuted, the term still persists as a social construct that has proven itself impossible to demolish. What buttresses racial categories' immovability is their unquestioned usage and the belief that they are based on "nature." When an individual exemplifies a racial stereotype—being an Asian who happens to academically excel, an African American who runs quicker than most, or a Latin American who enjoys a quality Salsa—he or she more deeply impresses the idea that racial categories match reality, no matter how unknowingly or unwillingly (Baker 2004:9).

However, beginning with the assumption that "race" exists and *then* pointing out the people who happen to fit its pre-established categories is a problematic standard-of-methods in its very nature. Many scholars have used this method to study race. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Loveman (1997) demonstrates the "pitfalls" of past racial analyses that do contest the way in which racial groups are characterized and then placed into a neat fold within the social

structure but do not question the assumption that “race” exists, although race did not always have the same significance that the term has today (Loveman 1997: 892-894).

The meaning of “race” has changed dramatically throughout the years. Before the rise of colonialism, in the sixteenth century, a “race” designated a “class of persons *or* things,” particularly the type of “breed” or “stock” (Bolaffi et al. 2003:241; Smedley 1998:694). From the time of “begetting” in the era of the Old Testament, the splendor of Rome and Greece, the reign of Alexander the Great, the apex of sea trading systems, into the beginnings of colonialism, kinship and occupation played an integral role in defining one’s identity, and that identity could be as flexible as all familial or professional ties can be. With the dynamics of trade and travel bringing different cultures together and with the ever-changing hands of power altering government structures, inter-cultural marriages and allegiances were frequently made without diminishing one’s original identity. Unlike the United States, a person could be enslaved one day and a free the next. Many of the people of pre-colonial eras accepted that change was inevitable, that people and their identity were not stagnant. With time, these perceptions on identity changed and the method of identification that shifted what one needed to know from family and social status to physical attributes evolved: the characterization of “racial groups” (Smedley 1998:691-693).

In England, the spread of race as a self-and-other defining factor initiated as a political strategy (Lentin 2008). Before they came to dominate what is now known as the United States, English men and women adopted the idea that the Irish who rebelled against British rule were “savages,” segregating them from the English community without attempting to understand their customs and beliefs that led to their resistance. When the English began to settle in the “New World,” their association of defiance with savagery traveled with them (Smedley 1998:694).

In the colonial world, unlike England with the Irish, labeling those who rebelled against British rule as “savages” to justify their subjugation proved insufficient in demarcating the line between the empowered and the powerless. With some of travelers to the New World being British men who had to work off the cost of their passage, some rebels were English themselves. Colonial leaders did not want alliances to be formed along lines of social status, heightening the possibility for uprisings such as Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676 in which British, poor freedmen aligned with African servants. Thus, they emphasized those freedmen’s “whiteness.” Leaders pushed for bonds to be formulated along color-lines so a poor White man would still deem himself superior to a poor Black man of the same social status (Smedley 2008:694). Within the next century, racial ideology became so embedded into the American psyche that science even adopted its rhetoric. Inhabitants of the United States began to fully believe that race was biologically based—that Whites were “naturally” at the top of the human hierarchy. This false ideology further strengthened prevailing ideas of White superiority (Bolaffi et al. 2003:242).

Although he discusses them in relation to the political fight over what categories would appear on the 2000 census in the United States, Baker’s (2001) theory of the “three P’s” ties perfectly to this historical moment. In his article “Profit, Power, and Privilege: The Racial Politics of Ancestry,” this cultural anthropologist argues that any battle over racial categories boils down to three principles: “profit, power, and privilege” (67). These three P’s are not only exemplified in the present-day dilemma of how to make the American census reflect its population, but in the very creation of the racial categories that have already become commonplace. As the “New World” became colonized, the English wanted to elevate their profits without threats of uprising. Thus, colonial leaders granted privileges to poor White

servants and stripped them from Black slaves, reaffirming all “White power” including their own.

Policy and science buttressed the “legitimacy” of race as a means to characterize an individual to the extent that, today, few Americans question its significance. Few contemplate why when asked “what are you?” they utter racialized labels, even when they do not know how to define the terms they use. When I did ask Miurel why she said Black versus African American, she stated she thought the terms were “interchangeable” and “African American” was simply a “pc” (politically-correct) manner of saying Black. Another student, Sarah, did not agree. To the same question, Sarah replied “Black includes a broad spectrum of colored people. African American is just African American,” proceeding to laugh (Interview, September 8, 2012). To Sarah, Black was a racial category, reflecting one’s phenotype. Accordingly, an Antiguan and Jamaican woman like herself could identify as Black but resent being labeled African American, seeing the term as indicative of behaviors and traditions that were contradictory to her West Indian beliefs.

International student Lizete could not understand how some of the students she encountered could identify as Black at all, particularly those of lighter complexions. In comparison to her American classmates, Lizete had an interesting perspective on race that I did not see during my other interviews. Throughout our interview, I found myself having to ask Lizete to explain the different racial labels that she was using. She kept referring to herself as “coloured” (Interview, September 21, 2012). Referencing all of the United States history courses I had ever taken, I could not help but associate the term “coloured” with the debasement of all those who were historically tagged with this label. However, I did know that, in South Africa, “coloured” was socially and politically accepted as much as any racial label that is used in the

United States. Yet, in the United States, Lizete found herself having to renegotiate her identity because the people whom she saw as “coloured” called themselves Black. Lizete shared:

*Because I was exposed to a lot more diversity at home, now, I feel like the categories that I can choose from have been narrowed down so much...especially like take the box forms. There's only like, on a high-detailed one there's like eight but on most there's like four: white, Asian, Black, or Hispanic. Those are like the four, especially in America...I think through the application process and coming to America, I have those four categories in my head so whenever I meet people, I try to fit them into those four categories that I figure is here in America but then also, since being here I've been soooo exposed to how mixed people are, even white people...The main thing has been color for me. Like, someone who I would look at, and look at their skin color and be like 'Ok you should be coloured' but um... [pause]...obviously they wouldn't identify with that culture. . . that's the main thing I feel like I miss being in America is a coloured culture . . .when I first came here I was trying to find that in people who are mixed but then they don't identify... (Interview, September 21, 2012)*

Lizete yearned to find someone who labeled themselves in the same way that she did, to find someone who would put her back in touch with her coloured culture. In South Africa, Lizete had a label with which identify. Being coloured was its own, “pure” category. She had no two categories between which she had to feel trapped. Despite this, through a single application, she still felt trapped into using our nation’s racial labels before she even stepped onto the United States’ soil. Through the application process alone, Lizete had four

categories implanted in her head that she thought everyone should fit, but she did not. By adopting a system of identification that had no place for her despite having her own, her experience shows how influential the United States' racial categories are on the mentality of all of those who encounter them.

The pressure that this student felt to fit all those around her into one of categories shows the context of self-perception's construction within the United States includes both internal and external influences that are constantly at play. Widely-accepted definitions and descriptions form one's perceived choices for "group identification." The embracing of those external pictures of people and their categories determines what label a person actually uses (Jenkins 1994: 218-219). In reference to the students that I interviewed, pulls on the developmental strings of their identity did include societal stereotypes, as shown with Deja, Miurel, David and many other interviewees, but those cords were also governmental on two levels.

Firstly, certain government policies, however unwillingly and unavoidably, perpetuate the associations that come to mind with both cultural and racial groups. Secondly, with the Census and any other paperwork that asks a person in the United States to "check off" his or her category in a list, government decides what boxes will appear and therefore decides what boxes the students see as acceptable labels for their identity. This was seen with Segun's laughter after calling himself "Halffrican," Lizete's urge to categorize Americans after applying to American schools, Andrew's dismay of "multicultural" as a category he could use, and other students' reference to what could be "checked" as why they answered "What are you?" the way that they did. Those references illuminate the adoption of American culture that has taken place in every student that I interviewed.

Miurel, Sarah, and Lizete's reflections on the racial categories denote two of its main traits that both literature and my interviews have shown: its arbitrary, fluctuating nature and its potent, unquestioned influence. Although they all associate race with appearance, none of these women would define or view race exactly the same. In Lizete's case, her country-of-origin did not even use the same categories, demonstrating the contingency of racial ideology on location and discrediting contradictory claims that racial categories are "naturally" based.

Despite her search for a South African, racial presence at Duke University, Lizete still surrendered to the racial standards of the United States. She stated how she began to try to fit everyone she met within one of four racial categories: "White, Asian, Black, or Hispanic" (Interview, September 21, 2012). Ironically, she also stated how being in the United States taught her how "mixed" people can be. Despite this realization, she still tried to categorize the people around her, which seems contradictory. The mere act of filling out an application to schools in the United States was enough to engrain our racial standards into her mind. Knowing that our nation's racial ideology has been embedding itself into the United States for the past four hundred years versus two years for this South African sophomore, how unquestioned race is as a category is not surprising.

On the other hand, that lack of astonishment does not deter from the fact that race is a social construct that governmental policy and even science has embedded into American culture. What the absence of deliberation does do is preserve discriminatory hierarchies and promote stereotypes that have become so widespread, such as the poor being "lazy" and homosexuals being "diseased" (Baker 2004:11-12). Many recent and past scholars have analyzed how the social influences of racial ideology affect the outlook of the groups being so stringently defined. In his work, W.E.B Du Bois (1903) discusses the African American

dilemma after enslavement. With the abolition of slavery, African American men and women obtained the citizenship and human rights they had been denied for hundreds of years.

Nonetheless, White Americans still viewed and treated them as if they were “lesser” beings.

Time and space separating them from their African roots, African Americans were neither completely “African” nor accepted as completely “American.” Thus they faced the dilemma of the “double consciousness” which Du Bois defined as “twoness—“two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois 1903:4). In other words, African Americans had to establish their identity when two fighting ideals (the “African” and the “American”) pervaded their minds. Du Bois’ post-enslavement example highlights how circulating beliefs can affect a group’s self-identification and the identity crises that can result. Today, countless scholars in different fields of academia still analyze how being descended from generation after generation of spiritually beaten men and women has affected Black youths (Smedley 1998:698).

Nevertheless, despite years of debasement, Du Bois was able to disclose gifts that African Americans had obtained over the years. For example, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois often discusses a “veil” through which African Americans view the world as it hangs between them and “Opportunity” (Du Bois 1903: 49). This phenomenon is often referred to as the “Veil of Color,” as if it is a physical manifestation of the color-line, differentiating their perspective of world from their White counterparts. Within in the “veil,” where African Americans reside, change is occurring, but at a different rate than the world outside of the veil, with the state of Black Americans only slowly progressing. Although Du Bois deemed

this divergence in advancement as the origin of African Americans' "double life" and "double thoughts," the veil appears to have a positive component as well (143).

When this renowned scholar first mentioned the "warring ideals" of Black Americans, he mentioned that the "Negro" who was "born with a veil" was "gifted with second-sight in this American world" (Du Bois 1903: 4). Referencing the "Negro" as "gifted" suggests that the "veil" is both a gift and a curse. Their difference (as White Americans deem them) grants them the ability to view the world in an alternative light than White Americans, blessing them and making them "other" than the American norm at the same time. Their ability to see beyond power and industry allowed them to create what Du Bois deemed the "sole American music," sharing the stories of people born in the United States through African American "sorrow songs" or spirituals (179). Although Du Bois' work showed both light and darkness in the history of ostracism of African Americans, the history of other racial categories reveals faults in racial ideology as well.

When the Nixon Administration created the term "Hispanic" in 1973, many citizens of the United States who became associated with the term were infuriated (Rodriguez 2002: 105). As the usage of the label spread across the nation in the 1970s, Suzanne Oboler's (1992) ethnographic work in New York City showed how both middle-class and working-class men and women from Spanish-speaking countries rejected the term. Oboler called the term an effort to "homogenize" and disregard the multiplicity of the millions of people who were from such countries. One woman from El Salvador even equated the term with calling them "pigs," seeing the label as "derogatory" (22-23).

To be fair, not all of the consequences of having racial categories are negative. Du Bois' work discloses both their rewards and limitations for African Americans. Other works

have shown that, if utilized positively, racial classifications could become a means of forming a community or support group around oneself, whether mentally or physically. Feeling as if one is a part of a community can further create the desire to research the ancestors of that community, strengthening pride in one's heritage and creating the basis for movements such as "Nativism" and "Afrocentrism" (Smedley 1998:695). In government, politicians and lawmakers use racial terminology to allocate resources to the people who have historically needed them the most and who today proceed to be disproportionately disadvantaged. These potential benefits and others present a potential means of brightening the dark foundations of today's racial categories, allowing them to be potentially used with pride rather than hate.

The instances in which students did not attempt to counter the negative stereotypes of their racial background surprised me the most. Sometimes their own behaviors negated the typecasts of their racial group but they still seemed to believe the false associations had some merit. While I acknowledge that I may be more familiar with the strategic creation of racial categories than some of my interviewees, I could not fight my shock when David casually made statements that sounded too-cliché-for-comfort. During our interview, David said he was not Black in the way people think about being Black. In his words, he was just "a person who happens to be Black" (Interview, September 9, 2012). In other words, he did not think he fit the stereotypes of a Black man. Unlike his African American peers in school who he said negatively affected him, he cared about his grades. When asked about what characterizes blackness, he referenced "chicken, Kool Aid, and collard greens."

Being raised in a county where most of the African Americans he saw fit their unfortunate, stereotypical mold greatly affected the way David spoke about other individuals

of the Black race. His environment affected this undergraduate to the point that he felt the need to make the disclaimer that he was simply “a person who happens to be black,” as if he were not a “real” Black man because he did not fit the image of the Black race painted in his mind. His picture of blackness had been created and enforced since the beginning of the New World and his experiences only reinforced them. However, he is not in that environment any longer. Educated, Black students and faculty cross his path every day, yet what still comes to mind when I mentioned “blackness” were disruptive classmates, chicken, Kool Aid, and collard greens. Despite his new academic setting, the persistence of unawareness remained in Duke’s structure of scholarly excellence.

I do not believe that David actually believes that *every* individual who would identify as Black is as easily and uniformly describable as his statements suggest. According to the United States’ phenotypical definition of the word, he *is* Black and I do not think he could so easily characterize himself. Instead, what his statements do confirm is the power of an idea even when a contradiction reflects back in the mirror. Because of the label’s negative connotations so deeply entrenched in the American psyche, those who I thought would be trying to embrace and emphasize the positive qualities of their race were finding ways to distinguish themselves. In this instance, David had mentally and verbally separated himself from what “being Black” signified to him. For David, within the Black category, both the “self” and the “other” lived together.

Students like David seemed to be negotiating their racial identity, distinguishing themselves without denying being Black completely. Such behavior is similar to John L. Jackson’s discussion of “negotiation” with Black America in Harlem, New York. In his study, whenever African Americans of different economic classes interacted, Jackson noticed

that those of a higher economic status “negotiated” or evaluated their relationship with those of lower classes. With architect Paul, that compromise entailed having two separate birthday parties in order to keep his “peeps” (his lower-class family and high school friends) and his “peers” (his work colleagues) in their separate “worlds” ( Baker 2003:268). Some, such as Cynthia, maneuvered through the classes by devaluing any relationship that she had with someone of a lower class, not classifying their bond as “real” friendship, even if it clearly was (Baker 2003:273-285).

Following the trajectory of these Black Harlemites who did not feel completely comfortable with their lower-class peers, David, Miurel, Deja and Sydney and the other students mentioned in this chapter negotiate their variance with the dominant, Black image around them. David embraces himself as Black but in a way that suggests that he is the exception, not the norm. Others use the label because of its acceptance and dominance, not because they feel as if they fully embody them. Referencing this back to the significance of racial categories, they are powerful, conflicting labels that can make a person feel as if they are both part of a group and separate from that identical group at the same time. Instead of questioning the dimensions and existence of the categories themselves, the students justified their racial groups the best way they could: denying its associations for themselves without tackling the feat of questioning its associations and usage amongst the mass.

### **WHITE CULTURE, OR THE LACK THEREOF**

With the plethora of ideas about different racial groups that my interviewees shared about their respective racial categories, none seemed able to clearly demarcate the White race as easily as they could describe minority races. When Deja spoke about her Black and White family, I

asked her if she ever considered those categories to distinguish different cultures or if she only saw them as color lines. To this question she replied:

*It's just a color honestly. I feel like there's a lot more to blackness than there is to whiteness. Like, there's some sort of history with blackness. With whiteness, there's nothing really to hold on to in a way. . . I don't really think white's a culture. I feel like African Americans have their own culture and I'm not saying they're all the same across the board. It might be regional as well but like whiteness, most of the time, there's no culture associated with it. You just sort of separate yourself...it's like this blob. You might have had some immigrants who assimilated from somewhere but eventually you assimilated to this ideal of what you're supposed to be in America so you lost that culture along the way....Eventually America makes you into this thing that's superior over other things. (September 7, 2012)*

Deja made several interesting claims within this quote. Firstly, she felt as if “whiteness” equated an undefined “blob” of people. Due to White Americans’ years of separation from their ancestors’ way of life, they lack culture. They simply behave according to the “American way.” Not only was their culture indescribable as a result of this severance, “whiteness” made White Americans more powerful than the people around them. On the other hand, she deemed that African Americans (who have just as much time between them and their African ancestors) do have a culture. Yet, the only differences between the two groups were the colors of their skin and one’s undefinable way of life.

Maria also felt similarly about the White race. Maria did not explicitly say that she thought of White as merely a color, but during our interview she revealed that her

paternal family has an Irish Catholic history. When I asked her why she did not mention this when she was answering the question “what are you,” she said that her family did not exhibit any of the Irish Catholic traditions; they were simply “regular White Americans” (Interview, October 1, 2012). Hence, Maria suggests that she did not mention her family’s European heritage because they acted normally for Americans, inferring that because her family did not comport themselves according to the Irish Catholic culture, their culture could not be defined beyond White and “regular.”

While discussing race in her own country, Lizete stated “Color, especially in South Africa, denotes a lot about your socioeconomic status. If you’re lighter you’re richer. . .” (Interview, September 21, 2012). The same can be said in the United States. History, policy, media, and society have embedded the idea that color is supposed to signify a great deal about a person’s quality as a human being, and the “white” population is seen as the colorless.

In her article, “White Means Never Having to Say You’re Ethnic,” Pamela Perry (2001) studied the position of White Americans in the United States. Perry states, “To be cultureless implies that one is either the ‘norm’ (the standard by which others are judged) or ‘rational’ (developmentally advanced)” (57). She finds that White Americans established the idea of being “cultureless” through “historically constituted practices” that felt “natural” to them. For individuals of other races, the “embedding of whiteness within a Western paradigm that subordinates all things cultural” generated sentiments of “whiteness” as cultureless (Perry 2001: 57). Subsequently, due to their traditions, White Americans felt as their actions were “normal.” Due to the history of White superiority in the United States and other Western nations, minority groups viewed the actions of White

Americans as normal as well, deeming them “cultureless” and consequently reconfirming their superiority.

Tying this to Deja, Maria, and Lizete’s statements, by Maria calling her White family “regular” and Deja referring to whiteness as a “blob” of people assimilated to the American way, these students imply that whiteness *is* American. Defining whiteness in the context of the United States is impossible for these students because it is the prototype, the standard by which all others are judged. This belief that the way the White behaves is “normal” explains why Deja, and many other residents of the United States, feel as though to identify as White is to be “superior.” Lizete’s quote and the fact that the White are colorless further demonstrates how racial constructs strengthen perceptions about White power,” positioning them as the “norm,” not requiring further characterization.

The absence of the need to say “White American” versus “African American,” “Asian American” or any of the other common subsets of the population of the United States further buttresses the image of White racial superiority. White Americans remain called simply “American” because they are the standard. Thus, even the absence of racial characteristics can fortify the power of racialized thought and language. That power reaffirms the need for this chapter and its analysis of race in order to understand the language that the multicultural use to identify themselves. With race so heavily affecting the way the students that I interviewed viewed themselves and others, analyzing the history of race in the United States is essential to understanding my interviewees self-identify.

## **RACE VERSUS CULTURE: THE DISTINGUISHING FACTOR**

Countless paradoxes of *any* widely-circulating typecast of a race exist within the United States. Yet, racial ideology persists because it is so deeply entrenched in the history of the United States. With racial ideology being so powerful in this nation, even an international student such as Lizete—whose own racial category does not exist here—cannot fight the urge to adopt its strict stratifications. These academic and ethnographic affirmations of the prominent nature of race in American thought are why the foundations of race need to be investigated in any project seeking to understand the formulation of identity within the framework of the United States, especially when family background is a key-point of interest as in my ethnographic project. Although its existence is not an academic reality, race is a social one.

While this means I should consider racial constructs whenever my interviewees use racialized language or labels, differentiating the students that I interviewed by emphasizing their race is not necessarily the best scholarly option. Unlike race that has a history of redefinition before obtaining its current association with an individual's physical attributes, another means of characterizing and understanding groups of people is far more reflective of the differences between the student I interviewed and was more influential on how they established their identities. That method is culture.

Although power-holders could use different cultural labels to bolster power dynamics and although cultures are free to fluctuate like race, I believe culture, as defined today, reveals more about my interviewees than race ever could. English philosopher and scientist established culture's first definition: "a body of knowledge and manners acquired by an individual" (Bolaffi et al. 2003:61). In the late nineteenth century, in classical anthropology, its definition became:

... [the] complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society...(Bolaffi et al. 2003:61)

In the field of psychiatry, culture is:

...common heritage or set of beliefs, norms, and values...the categories, plans, and rules people use to interpret their world and act purposefully with it...culture is learned as children grow up in society. (Sen and Chowdhury 2006:174)

Today culture “describes the shared customs, values and beliefs “ or “meaning and “behavior” “which characterize a given social group” and “ are passed down from generation to generation” (Bolaffi et al. 2003:61; López-Mulniz and Munix 2006:4).

Unlike race’s fluctuating meaning, the fundamental basis of culture remained throughout its evolution. No matter the field or the timeframe, culture has been a set of beliefs and values that could affect an individual’s habits, beliefs or behavior. Most importantly, culture is acquired. The term is not seen as based on intrinsic values or characteristics that cannot be transformed. By being taught and learned, its lessons, teachers, and pupils can change. Culture allots for modification in its definition. Since identity constantly evolves, its learned, adaptable and contextual structure makes culture the most appropriate means of studying its formulation for a particular group such as the multicultural.

How the students described their families further showcases the applicability of the term “culture.” Based on the behavioral-based and value-emphasized definitions of culture versus the “scientific,” physical determination of race, what made my interviewees’ maternal and paternal families so different and potentially “conflicting” were their cultural differences,

not their racial ones. With Christian, he identified his families' differences as more racial or physical, because culturally, their desire to succeed and make money drove them. However, unlike Christian who applied the academic definition of race, many other students who discussed "racial differences" between their families referenced qualities that, academically, would be associated with culture. For example, whenever a student grouped actions with a particular race, their actions were the results of their beliefs, and beliefs are components of cultural groups.

Sometimes students spoke of race as an act to be done. During our conversation, Sydney referenced the many times that his teammates accused him of denying his Black roots because of the way he comported himself. In accordance with these ties between performance and race, psychology and English professors Markus and Moya (2010) argue that race is an act to be "done." In *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, these scholars claim that race is not a trait we simply have or a characteristic we naturally are; race is what we do. They define race as "everyday doings involving routine social interactions as well as the institutional policies and practices of our society" (Markus and Moya 2010: 5). In other words, individuals' behavior and habits within their political and societal structure determines their race.

The nature of this definition concerns me. While such a perspective on race could create bonds across racial boundaries to the people who act similarly, this definition could also be manipulated to further deteriorate the image of a particular racial group. Academia would have to decide what behaviorisms will be associated with what race. Would any "Tiger mom," be seen as Asian? Would any individual who spoke "proper" English become White? As was the case with some of my interviewees and the Harlemites of Jackson's piece,

would a lack of drive or education make a person Black? Instead of a contradiction of the behaviorism associated with a particular race being used as a means to undermine stereotypes, someone could use the human contradiction to enforce them by swiftly reassigning that person into another racial category.

Conversely, if what we do is viewed as cultural and learned, how unique and influential every human experience is would not be overlooked when delineating the basis for commonalities across groups. For this reason, when I contemplated what word best united all of the students that I interviewed, instead of seeing them as multiracial, biracial, or as any other racialized label, I saw the students I interviewed as multicultural. Their values, traditions, family dynamics, and sets of beliefs differentiated them; where those characteristics overlapped—through their culturally diverse maternal and paternal families—made them potentially fit beneath one umbrella term.

Even though I am using the word “multicultural” to unify my interviewees, its use is not meant to be a means to typecast, as so many labels are used for today. There is no one way of being multicultural. With many of the students with whom I spoke, they were born multicultural because two people from different cultural backgrounds chose to have a child together. Jessica and Sophia became so culturally diverse because of political strife in her family’s countries of origins that brought their families together; Lizete, because of the influences of colonialism in Mozambique. No two individuals placed under this marker are exactly the same. Their only similarities are that their paternal and maternal families *directly* and *presently* (not through their past) represent different cultures. To avoid the trap of trying to homogenize the multicultural beyond this single common thread and undermine their individuality, this point must be made.

Although many may have heard the term multicultural at some point in their lives, the phrase does not correspond to the history of race and culture that was previously described. The consequences of the term's political lack of recognition and movements to strengthen its acknowledgement will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MULTICULTURALISM: FROM A CHILD TO A MOVEMENT

#### THE ALIEN, MIXED AND LANGUAGE

“*What happens when we don’t have a language to describe something?*” My professor asked this question in the front of the class, anxiously and excitedly awaiting an answer. The class was silent for a few seconds, which must have felt as if a millennium had passed for my professor as she stood bursting in the front of the class. Then one student in the back of the stage-like classroom slowly raised his hand and said, “They’re marginalized.” to which she replied “*Exactly!!* When we don’t have a language for it, we marginalize it! *How* many times have we seen this in our films?”

As I began to think about this question and she began to delineate its answer, the proof of this claim slowly unraveled in my mind. The alien, vegetable *Thing from Another World* (1951) who we watched get electrocuted, the robotic, super humans who were ostracized and killed in *Blade Runner* (1982), the clones of *Moon* (2009) who were created and sent off the planet—all of these beings existed beyond the “normal” bounds of human relations and pre-existing definitions. They questioned all we thought “being human” signified; the imagined creatures contradicted what we knew, understood and could therefore explain with our current language. As a result, they were marginalized to the outskirts of the human-line, to a place where they were deemed inferior and no longer needing their own language. They were simply deemed abnormal, unnatural anomalies.

As I sat in my “Science Fiction Films” course, I made a connection to my research. Whenever I interviewed a student and heard their stories, whenever I felt as if I needed to identify in a particular way, I witnessed the treatment of the “other” of Science Fiction and the

multicultural. What I learned in my films course was that since the 1950s, many American Science Fiction authors have used this genre to explore race relations in the United States (Nama 2008). In science fiction films and stories, the crossed paths may be between different species rather than different cultures, but with analysis, similarities between the responses to those crosses are distinguishable. As many Science Fiction filmmakers and novelists have done over the past six decades with other minority groups, I will explore how the history of race and culture in the United States can affect the multicultural.

In “Bloodchild,” Octavia E. Butler (1995) shares an unusual love story between a human Terran and an alien Tlic. Having left their home planet to escape prosecution, the Terran, a group of humans, find themselves on the alien planet of the Tlic—an almost reptilian species, with four sets of limbs, a desensitizing-stinging tail and lethal claws that contradict their aquatic, smooth motion across land. With time, the Tlic government drafted policies that would benefit both species on the planet: baby Tlic would be implanted and grown inside the Terran until the babies were fully developed and the Terran would be protected from the Tlic who wanted to treat them as breeding animals. Tlic “adopted” Terran families on a newly established Preserve for human beings. The most important Tlic to assure the safety of the Terran was T’Gatori, who adopted the narrator of “Bloodchild,” named Gan, to bear her children.

At first glance, any possible connection between these alien-human relations and the experience of the multicultural may not be easily distinguished, but central components of these relationships converge. Firstly, the title of this short story and the product of the Tlic-Terran copulation is a “bloodchild.” Blood relatives, blood ties, blood oaths—all of these phrases are familiar across cultural lines. Saying that “blood” connects two beings generates ideas of being a part of a “natural” and “irrevocable” bond that cannot be unhinged (Sahlins 2011:2).

Considering this, whenever a Terran and Tlic come together to create a “bloodchild,” they have essentially generated a “mixed” newborn: a newborn introduced to the world through the union of two entities from (literally) completely different worlds.

Of course, the argument can be made that the Gan and other Terran who take on Tlic eggs are merely surrogates, holding the fetus with no real connection to the eggs. This viewpoint would relinquish the justifiability of seeing the bloodchild as mixed. However, even surrogates can be considered kin to the babies they carry through pooled bodily fluids (such as blood and milk), through time spent together, and through the experience of labor (Pande 2009: 379-380). In her article “‘It May Be Her Eggs But It’s My Blood’”: Surrogates and Everyday Forms of Kinship of India,” Pande (2009) considers relationships and kinship to be based on daily interactions, not initial consummation. Based on these assurances, Gan and other human “surrogates” share a definable relationship with the Tlic eggs they carry, birthing a mixed-bloodchild.

If the Tlic mother and Terran carrier chose to stay together, their child would be in an undefined category of its own. This child would be both Terran and Tlic but not quite either. The children would become the “other.” Nama (2008), a professor of African American studies, analyzed images of alienness and otherness in Science Fiction in his work *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction*. His research reveals how the characters who are seen as different or “other” allude to patterns of race relations and racial paranoia in the United States in which minority groups, particularly African Americans, are seen as outcasts. Although his analysis focused on Science Fiction and the image of African Americans, his findings are applicable to any minority group, including the multicultural. As referenced in the first chapter, in the United States, perceptions of race are less contextual and malleable than culture, but

categories within both of these terms lack a place for the multicultural, placing those of mixed cultural heritage into a liminal state between categories because they have none of their own (Turner 1964). A lack of language, their image of “difference” and exception—these are the qualities that make the alien, science-fictional “other” relatable to the multicultural.

The exact nature of the life of the bloodchild in Butler’s short story was not shared, but what happens in our world with such children and adults can be examined. For some, such a background would make no difference in their lives. Maria could not decipher any difference between herself and anyone who happened to have parents from the same cultural background. Maria was the only student that I interviewed who questioned the significance of my research project and speculated about my interest in multicultural students versus any other student. Any question that I asked received nonchalant, shrug-of-the-shoulder answers. This may have been due to the fact that she seemed a bit uncomfortable throughout the interview, so she may have simply wanted to speed up the interview with short answers and casual indifference. On the other hand, to her, being multicultural did not seem to have made any serious impact on her life that she could delineate.

Having spent elementary school and high school in the United States and middle school in Mexico, Maria has always straddled national lines, physically and culturally. Telling her teacher in Mexico not to speak negatively about Americans and telling her American peers not to make jokes about Mexicans did not seem earth-shattering enough to make her feel any different from her peers. This student did not appear liminal but completely comfortable with both sides of her family and identity. The only time she ever felt as if she had been perceived differently than she would view herself was when a date called her “exotic” after learning about her Mexican background. She experienced no moments in her life that made her feel as if her parental

circumstances generated any significant difference in who she was or how she was treated (Interview, October 1, 2012).

I only saw such little effect of one's multicultural background on a multicultural student during my interview with Maria. During the others, my interviewees' diverse backgrounds greatly impacted their identity, perceptions, and sometimes their treatment. I did not only see this in my interviews but in the life stories of the multicultural scholars whom I read. For example, in his article "My Father Has No Children: Reflections on a Hapa Identity toward a Hermeneutic of Particularity," Hawaiian scholar Henry R. Rietz (2002) shares the details of his upbringings with a German mother and Japanese father. He discloses that, as a child, he was kept secret from his traditional, Japanese relatives until he married and had a daughter. His isolation led him to feel as if he never fully embodied the "Japanese way" but instead encompassed its deterioration, with each generation he beget being less and less "Japanese" (145-150).

Unlike the monsters and aliens discussed in my Science Fiction English class or Bulter's "Bloodchild," Rietz had a label with which he could identify: *hapa*, the Hawaiian word for "mixed." However, having an individual identity did not bring Rietz ease-of-mind. This scholar still struggled to be more Japanese rather than to establish a *hapa* identity. With ideals of racial and cultural purity pervading history and the threat of a "double consciousness" being the consequence of that "purity" becoming mixed, Rietz's desire to find his fit within a category other than *hapa* did not surprise me. In order for terms to become widely accepted, years of buttressing from individuals, politicians and power-holders have to pass to cement their use in our everyday language. Thus, personal language is not enough if that language is not widespread and accepted. Adoption of a new category or language to characterize our cultural and racial relations requires not just an individual "bloodchild" making ripples in societal perceptions of

relationships and culture, but an influential movement to buttress those ripples into forceful waves across the American psyche.

### **WHAT BOX DO I FIT?: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MULTICULTURAL MOVEMENT**

Being a woman of African American and White mixed background herself, sociologist Kimberly DaCosta wanted to explore the ways the multicultural individual developed a united front. According to this scholar, the initial efforts to give a national voice to and awareness about multicultural individuals within the nation began with the 1993 hearings of the United States House Subcommittee on “Census, Statistics, and Postal Personnel.” At the hearings, politicians and special interest groups wanted options such as “Native Hawaiians” and “Latino” added to the National Census. What DaCosta considered the most “explosive” motion for the census was the addition of a multiracial or multicultural option (DaCosta 2007: 1). What differentiated the Association of Multiethnic Americans from the initiatives of other interest groups at the subcommittee meeting was their challenge of the framework of governmental, racial and cultural stratifications. They were not asking for a small addition within the confines of present-day ethnic structure; they were requesting a new look at the monoracial structure of the Census itself.

Some interest groups opposed this change. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued that the purpose of the Census was to establish the “identification” of the citizens within the United States, not their identity. In other words, how people identified themselves was irrelevant to the purposes of the Census; how others and society as a whole identified a person was more important. Some terms had even been created for the person of identification. As referenced previously, during the American fair of

1973, the Nixon Administration created the category “Hispanic” to “describe a world that exists by portraying a world that doesn’t” (Rodriguez 2002: 105). Nixon created a category to tie together groups of individuals of different cultures and origins under one umbrella that the individuals themselves did not necessarily fit. Because Nixon created the label, no one outside of the United States would even recognize it.

With any of its boxes being manufactured in such a manner, correctly labeling participants’ identity would not appear the goal of the Census. Accordingly, the NAACP urged the Census officers not to create a new multiracial option in order to get more accurate statistics on intercity demographics (Baker 2001: 66). Returning to Baker’s “three P’s”—the argument that every fight over race and culture boils down to “profit, power and privilege”—having a new choice on the Census would also affect the allocation of national and state resources to different regions and cities. Thus, when the NAACP made attempts to preserve the “accuracy” of the Census, they were considering their stakes in the three P’s as well. To the NAACP, race signified “political status;” to the Association of Multiethnic Americans, their ancestry (Baker 2001: 66).

Having a particular, suitable box to check on a survey that is sent across the nation every ten years may not seem significant, especially when thinking about the visibility and organization of millions of people. However, with several of my interviews, despite never mentioning “boxes,” I saw how important selecting a box can be to an individual. For Filipino and White Andrew, the first dilemma he faced as a multicultural student was making such a choice on a classroom survey. When he asked his mother, “Well what do we [his sister and himself] put on the boxes,” she simply stated “put white” (Interview, September 10, 2012). With this selection came the dilemma that others would not see him as White, thus he began looking at

the other options available to him, such as “Pacific Islander,” a box to which he did not feel as if he completely belonged either. Andrew claimed, for him:

*There was nothing to identify with from a multicultural perspective. There was only monocultures...there was nothing as far to reconcile...there was no belonging and if there...was belonging [pause] it was still only half true.*

(Interview, September 10, 2012)

The absence of a multicultural option and the unbreakable reign of monocultural thought and stereotypes stripped Andrew of any feelings of “belonging” to one group. He did not think any community really existed amongst the multicultural, especially since they were *multi*-cultural, all potentially having vastly different backgrounds. As stated before, there is no one way to be multicultural. Accordingly, the multicultural can encompass a large spectrum of individuals. Not fitting any one group could be common ground upon which to formulate bonds, but the essence of being of different cultures seemed to be an inhibitor to formulating a community as well.

As seen in the introduction, Segun had no issue with referring to himself as Black or African American whenever he had to select a single box. Despite having a White mother, he had always seen himself as Black. However, when posed the question “what are you?” he stated he usually replied “Halfrican,” (Interview, September 23, 2012). During his junior year of high school, a classmate introduced Segun to the term, but he assured me “It’s supposed to illicit a laugh... not like a serious response.” He attributed its comedic nature to its absence from any form he had ever completed. What was most interesting about this conversation was not the term “Halfrican” itself, but the fact that Segun seemed to have established a category for himself (whether jokingly or seriously) that suited him but it was still not good enough. “Halfrican”

could only be a joke until it obtained wide use and acceptance. Until that happened, selecting Black sufficed.

Jamaican and Costa Rican student Anthony could not select Black as easily at first. Despite most peers generally assuming he was African American, the Jamaican culture interlocked Anthony's entire upbringing. As a result, the multicultural senior self-identified as more West Indian than simply Black. However, with the smaller West Indian population in the South versus his home in New York, he adjusted. This Jamaican and Costa Rican undergraduate saw the strategic benefits of identifying as Black in order to have a stronger, "more salient" voice on campus. As a result, with time he stopped correcting his peers (Interview, September 28, 2012).

Conversely, Jamaican and Antiguan Sarah emphasized her West Indian roots more upon arriving to Duke, not less. Sarah did not see identifying as Black as a political approach to Duke's culture. For her, just referring to herself as Black depreciated the culture and values her Antiguan mother taught her. At Duke, unlike in Georgia, Black reflected a way of life with which she did not identify. Black was seen as having cultural components rather than being solely racial. (Interview, September 8, 2012).

Power, privilege, and profit versus interests of ancestry and culture—Anthony and Sarah represented the same concerns of the NAACP and the American Association of Multiethnics in the present-day. On one side, maintaining the current racial distinctions to advance a group was most important. On the other side, men, women and young adults such as Sarah found recognizing their heritage far more critical than settling for any potentially-beneficial box. While Sarah considered her ancestry and culture more important to reflect in her survey checks, Anthony saw the benefits of a boxed community. With the three P's, individual preferences, and

political influences all weighing in on the matter, how the multicultural would be categorized remained to be determined.

### **PERSISTENCE OF THE MULTICULTURAL AS “OTHER”**

A multicultural identity did not seem to permeate through the students that I interviewed. Only two of my fourteen interviewees (Jessica and Sophia) identified “multicultural” or “multiracial” as a valid, holistic label with which to categorize their diverse families. To be considered, Jessica was one of the most culturally diverse students I interviewed, making multicultural her simplest choice. However, the miniscule use of such terms is still significant.

Revisiting the subcommittee for the 2000 Census, administrators chose to allow citizens to select more than one of fifteen options: Spanish/Hispanic/Latino with the subcategories of “Mexican/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and “other”; white; Black/ African American/ Negro; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian Indian; Chinese; Filipino; Japanese; Korean; Vietnamese; Other Asian; Native Hawaiian; Guamanian or Chamorro; Samoan; and Other Pacific Islander (United States Census Bureau 2001). Bi- or multiracial or -cultural did not appear as an option. Witnessing the importance of the presence or absence of a box with which a student can identify, I believe the absence of such an option is integral to why a widely accepted multicultural identity still does not exist. Without a choice that reflects their diverse family backgrounds, without the ability to establish their identities rather than their identification, being “multicultural,” “multiracial,” or any other “mixed” category would not be deemed legitimate.

Personally, I know how pressured one can feel when filling out a form that asks about ethnicity, race or ancestry. I have felt the unexplainable excitement and surprise whenever bi- or multiracial is an option on a form. Thankfully, on the Census, I would have the option of making multiple selections, recognizing both my father’s and mother’s cultural background, but this is

not always an option either. In such cases, I felt as if I had to choose whether I would be more Puerto Rican or African American for the day. However, this was only a personal feeling, as are the other testimonies shared in this chapter.

Surveys that request information about one's racial, ethnic, or cultural background are generally distributed for statistical purposes. Unless the questionnaire is an application for a resource intended for a particular demographic, the likelihood of someone investigating the accuracy of the box checked is miniscule. What reaffirms the significance of the labels we pick on such inquires is the history and authority behind the choices. As shown in the first chapter and in the example of the "Hispanic" category, the racial and cultural categories we use can change with time. Nevertheless, that alteration requires a powerful hand, such as the Nixon administration, to gain national application and acceptance. The source of authority to create a change for the multicultural has not yet arrived. While a box could never fully capture the depth of a human being, the checkbox my interviewees chose remained important to them and me. Thus, although the screening of individuals' selections may not actually be occurring on the grand scale, they were analyzed on personal levels, by my interviewees and the Association of Multiethnic Americans.

For those who feel similarly about the importance of the categories elected on a form, when multiple choices cannot be chosen and the rare appearance of a label that accounts for a mixture does not arise, the multicultural are left with two options: the checking of one box or "other." Only a small percentage of the United States identified with multiple races on the 2000 and 2010 Census, representing merely 2.4% and 2.9% of the population respectively. Nevertheless, that percentile still represents nearly seven million citizens. In spite of their numbers, these residents can still become reduced to "other." Similar to the "bloodchild," my

country of origin lacked a category with which to define me and others similar to me. Being of mixed origins made the multicultural classifiable in the same “Other” category historical anthropologists and travelers placed the non-Western, indigenous groups they encountered.

The students that I interviewed and myself were “half” this and “half” that but not something that could be identified as a whole. Why is this important? Why is a subcommittee meeting an understandable launch point for a multicultural movement? As referenced in the introduction, language is key. Language is power. In any discourse, “language choice” is a component of identity construction, collectively and individually. Without the language to describe someone or something, within discourse, that entity does not exist. Even when the borders that language establishes appear to shift to create space for an unplaced entity, some gatekeeper of power determines how abrupt that shift will be (Wodak 2011: 217).

Lacking a position in the current molds of culture could hold little significance to some multicultural citizens such as Maria. For others, being the undefinable in the schematics of culture in the United States could cause someone to struggle to verbally identify themselves, such as Sydney, Segun, Deja, and Andrew. This reveals a potential source of identity conflict for the multicultural.

As mentioned with Henry Rietz (2002), this scholar found the language to identify himself in the Hawaiian word *hapa*. However, this term proved inadequate. Rietz still lacked a word that encompassed his bicultural identity to his standards. Interestingly, in both Rietz lifetime and the genre of Science Fiction, a linguistic dilemma revealed itself in a way comparable to living, breathing human beings: the multicultural. Existing cultural and racial ideals inhibited the American populations’ ability to see categorical terms for what they really are: permeable, malleable, social constructs.

Advocates for the multicultural movement sought to emphasize these pliable qualities of our current racial and cultural structures. Analyzing the history of race and culture in the previous chapter demonstrated how groupings have changed with time. Different eras have different goals and needs that mold their racial and cultural categories. In 1993, a new movement began whose goal was to restructure the framework of American assortments in order to make room for the multicultural within its confinements. The act of establishing a multicultural identity would be two-pronged, involving both resistance to existing mono-racial and cultural ideology and the construction of a recognized categorization (Bernstein and De la Cruz 2009: 722).

Through hundreds of years of development, today, race is widely accepted as characterizing physical attributes, while culture denotes ones traditions, values, and beliefs (Bolaffi et al. 2003:61). Although more malleable than ideas about race, many cultures still have widely-accepted stereotypes, making the discovery of one's place in their denominations more difficult for those from multiple cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, successful realignment of racial and cultural thought and dialect on a national level could generate the change required for no citizen to have to be labeled as "other" again. Currently, that realization has not yet been reached and the potential source of conflict for the multicultural persists. Thus, the way the culturally diverse tackle the categorical history of the United States and their existence as "other" is most revealing about the state of the multicultural.

## **THE APPEARANCE OF MULTICULTURALISM ON DUKE'S CAMPUS**

### **THE REGIONAL EFFECT**

*"People [at Duke university] accept you for who you are. Like, you're half Dominican. Somebody can be Puerto Rican and Black.*

*Somebody can be white and be black. They see the difference... ”*  
(Interview, September 1, 2012)

*“...here [at Duke university] ...since we’re in the South...it’s more of a “Black” thing... well people know me as Jamaican [but] here we’re strange...we’re kind of like...endangered species [laughs]...”* (Interview, September 28, 2012)

*“I was pleasantly surprised at... the mix of people at Duke because I wasn’t sure what to expect, whether it’d be like only white people. Even though it is predominantly white there is a good mixture of different numbers and cultures and stuff...”* (Interview, September 9, 2012)

*“...you can’t separate a school from its environment...”*  
(Interview, September 6, 2012)

*“I was very selective in what I chose to identify... [at Duke university]...I realized not everyone in the world was just one race or worshipped one way...coming here allowed me to really open up...there’s the international community, the Brazilian group... there’s so many people from different backgrounds. It made me feel more comfortable in being myself...”* (Interview, September 11, 2012)

This is Duke. My field site is a place where Sydney can feel as if he attends one of the most accepting, culturally-aware institutions in the nation, a place where they do not try to clump individuals together but appreciate their differences (Interview, September 1, 2012). Less than a month after my interview with Sydney, on the same campus, Anthony can laugh at the little differentiation made between students who appear Black (Interview, September 28, 2012). At Duke, Lizete can expound upon her pleasant surprise that Duke has such a “good mixture” of students while Christian discounts the significance and influence of that diversity by emphasizing that, in the end, Duke is still a southern university (Interviews September 9, 2012; September 6, 2012). To him, no level of integration could undo the impact of years of

segregation and discrimination. On the opposite end, Jessica can claim Duke helped her recognize the diversity of the human population and helped her accept her family's eclectic cultural background (Interview, September 11, 2012). In this section, the spectrum of perspectives that multicultural students had about their university will be discussed and analyzed. Some emphasized positive aspects of Duke's racial milieu while others emphasized negative ones. As the students' are themselves, the students' views were varied and un-sortable into finite racial containers.

Each of these students comes from very diverse backgrounds, which greatly impacted their perspectives of Duke. Christian, Segun, Deja and Anthony were born in northern or western, more liberal parts of the country—California, Oregon, and New York respectively. From their descriptions, their hometowns had such cultural variety that differences obtained little attention. Anthony considered the recognition of his culture rather his race in New York as proof that Duke was not as culturally aware as his hometown. By reminiscing the recognition of his West Indian roots, Anthony's testimony suggests that awareness involves the active recognition of cultural differences rather than racial aggregations.

On the other hand, Christian and Segun felt as if in the South, their cultural identity was questioned more, not less. They spoke positively about being able to simply "pass" as Black without any further distinction being necessary. Despite his Nigerian and White background, Segun stated he was never asked about his family background as much as he has been since he matriculated to my Durham, North Carolina, field site. He had never heard so many individuals emphasize that he was "only" half Nigerian. In Oregon, he was Black, plain and simple. Christian also referenced times in which he "failed to pass" and someone pointed out to him, "No, you're not all Black! What are you?" He laughed at his failed attempts to be recognized as

solely black around his African American peers, jokingly reenacting his mental “Dang it” and snap of his fingers. Although he discussed the matter lightheartedly, the fact that he mentioned a desire to be seen as Black in particular circumstances rather than biracial is interesting. Based on his statements, Anthony would actually appreciate someone being interested enough to ask him about his background. Christian and Segun wanted no part in such a conversation.

Combining the experiences of all three of these students, Deja thought Duke students more readily asked her “what” she was and actively guessed the answer, with deductions ranging from Ethiopian to Hispanic. Unlike Christian, she did not attribute the questioning to the history of race relations in the South. Instead, Deja supposed that “people are more comfortable with asking those kinds of questions” (Interview, September 7, 2012). She thought the inquiries stemmed from the desire to uncover similarities in order to create relationships. By feeling as if having racial and cultural connections helped engender friendships, Deja suggests that at Duke racial and cultural similarities and the ability to form companionships are related. This ascertained correlation between race, culture and friendship could be indicative of the racially-focused mindset within which Christian, Segun, and Anthony considered Duke to be stuck.

Nevertheless, as the initial quotes show, not all of my interviewees would reach this conclusion about Duke. Some of the students with whom I spoke felt as if Duke allowed them to be themselves in a way their hometowns did not. Several students who viewed Duke in such a way were Rachel, Miurel, Cameron, Sophia, and Sydney. All of the students, except for Sophia, hailed from Southern regions of the United States. These men and women could say nothing negative or conflicting about being a multicultural student at Duke. They viewed the university as an accepting home for people of all cultural denominations.

Having had attended a majority-White Catholic high school in the southeast, Jessica always felt as if she was the exception to the White standard that surrounded her. Not wanting to ostracize herself from her peers, Jessica would always downplay how multicultural she really was, only recognizing her Brazilian and Filipino roots around her peers. However, once she arrived to Duke she felt as if she was finally in a place educated and unbiased enough to accept her full being, particularly her Iraqi heritage. Jessica ascribed her Duke in Brazil experience with the credit for making her finally “feel Brazilian” (Interview, September 11, 2012). In Brazil, she became more acquainted with her Brazilian culture, which helped her strengthen this aspect of her identity.

In southwest North Carolina, from her perspective, most of the African Americans around Miurel exemplified emphasis on “Black power” and stereotypical definitions of being Black in the United States. Because of her Panamanian cultural values, Miurel did not fit the mold she saw around her and did not feel the same pride as her paternal family. Furthermore, her African American peers in school often pointed out any dissimilarity they saw between themselves and Miurel, making her feel even more detached from the African Americans around her. From the way she spoke, the way she dressed, to the texture of her hair, Miurel felt as if her Black was not *really* Black according to what she had been exposed to her entire life. This reveals the implications of the idea of “doing race” could have on a person who does not comport themselves according to the standards of a racial group (Markus and Moya 2010). Nonetheless, Duke introduced Miurel to African Americans who accepted her. They wanted to get to know her as Miurel, not as a fellow “half” or complete African American. Her environment created the atmosphere in which Miurel could establish bonds that she had

previously found impossible. This student stated she had always felt Black and had always loved being Black but now, for the first time, others were accepting her “blackness” as well.

During his interview, Cameron appeared adaptable to any surroundings. Cameron’s friends of choice often changed as he developed his identity; he attempted to find ways to identify with his peers, whether they were white, African American or Latino. He referenced a time during his early teen years in which the majority of his friends in his hometown in Texas were Mexican, which made him attempt to make himself look and “act” Mexican. The way he spoke, the way he dressed, the way he styled his hair—all of these traits had to say “Mexican” for him to feel as if he belonged. Between the ages of twelve and eighteen, this student conducted culture performances of the communities with which he spent the most time. His ability to adapt to any environment could be seen as positive but as he sat and reflected, his behavioral shifts did not feel positive (Interview, September 9, 2012).

Nevertheless, once he matriculated to Duke University, those sentiments changed. This multicultural student identified the positive components of his cultural background. Cameron became involved in many culturally-aware student groups and projects, such as the Center for Race Relations and Me Too Monologues (an assortment of acts that portrays the anonymous stories of Duke students). At this institution, the more people asked him about “what” he was, the more he loved talking about his cultural background. He started to recognize the ignorance of his high school peers who attempted to label him and embraced his desire to roam the multiplicity around him, never settling within any one group. At Duke, once his need to identify with his peers disappeared, his multiculturalism led him to accept the cultural variety around him and to become settled in his own skin.

For South Carolinian Sydney, Duke symbolized acceptance. To this football player, students at his university did not make assumptions about his cultural background nor did they attempt to degrade him because of it. Sydney's classmates generally made him feel as if he was like any other student. However, Sydney was not just a classmate to some students, but also a teammate. As a player on a varsity team, Sydney sometimes felt pressure from his football colleagues to behave as a "black man should." His friends would sometimes say to him:

*'Man, you're black. Why you acting like you're Dominican all the time? You don't claim being black? Like, you always claim being Dominican'* (September 6, 2012)

To such claims from his teammates, Sydney affirmed:

*... I don't actually sit there and claim either one. I'm both and it's just how I'm going to be...It's just one of those things that's like...(sighed) you live with and roll with...(Interview, September 6, 2012)*

This athlete did not feel as if he "acted more Dominican" than African American or vice versa; he acknowledged both sides of his cultural upbringing. Despite the pressures from his teammates to play a particular racial role, having come from an even more racialized community, Sydney still saw Duke as an accepting university.

Sophia views of Duke most closely aligned with that of the students from Southern regions of the United States. Her original home in the Middle East sheltered families from across the globe. Conversely, her French high school was predominantly White and exemplified the image of the wealthy, stuck-up Parisian institution. Although not many faces like her own were represented there, her Kenyan identity actually grew at the school rather than digressed.

Her school's homogeneity pushed her urge to be true to her heritage to the point that her independence and confidence grew, making Duke a haven of diversity.

These accounts reflect the theme of the regional effect. Regional influences affecting individuals' perceptions are not unique to the multicultural. However, the regional effects that surfaced during my interviews deserve assay because they highlight many of the same factors that were discussed in previous sections of this research project. Those elements include the idea of "doing race," the conflict of the double consciousness and racial versus cultural distinctions. Students who felt pressured to "act" their race confirmed my concerns stated in Chapter One. Racial performance became a means to confine people within stereotypical pockets for identity.

The students continuously interlinked the definitions of race (color and phenotype) and culture (values, traditions and beliefs). With the students of the South, distinctions between the terms were not always made. When distinctions were made, how peers identified the students often did not match their desired identity. This again denotes the flaws in the established language for characterization in our nation, particularly racialized language. As with Jessica during her experience in Brazil, culture can be learned and change with the individual. Culture is more adaptable to the individual. With racialized thought, the associations of a defined race immediately pigeonhole human beings without consideration of personal background.

The discrepancies in interpretation and the pressure from accepted understandings of defined groups were the only apparent source of Du Bois's notion of a "double consciousness" for the students. My interviewees internally fought to balance between who they were and who others thought they should be. For the Southern students, that potential "double consciousness" appeared at Duke. For the Northern students and Sophia, their dilemma of the double consciousness disappeared upon their arrival.

Every student had their own personal experiences that impacted their identity and image of others. With such a diverse group of students matriculating into the school every year, variances in opinions of the institution are bound to exist on campus. What make these variances intellectually stimulating is their regional and scholarly correlations across the interviewees. These parallels show the importance of context, whether it is institutional, environmental, or historical. Without knowledge of context, one cannot adequately analyze and interpret the behaviors and beliefs of others. In reference to the students that I interviewed, their context incorporates both Duke University and the larger United States of America.

The analysis of Duke from the ethnographic perspective created vastly different images of the university. However, one particular claim did stand true. As Christian stated, “You can’t separate a school from its environment;” you cannot separate students from the place where they were raised for the majority of their lives (Interview, September 6, 2012). By revealing the connections between my initial research on race and culture in our nation, my interviewees’ similarities helped me understand my ethnographic field site on a national level. They demonstrated that conflicts faced on Duke’s campus reflect national sources of difficulty as well. The next section of this chapter moves from the personal stories of my interviewees to observances and famous, racially-significant moments on Duke’s campus.

### **DUKE: OBSERVANCES AND ANALYSIS BEYOND THE STUDENTS**

As a fellow student, I know how diverse the undergraduate population is and how many opportunities to learn about different cultures exist. Duke’s curriculum spans biology to psychology, Zimbabwean dialects to Chinese, cultural anthropology to sociology. We have

opportunities to travel across the globe for classes or for service. Despite the many opportunities to travel and learn, Duke does not always obtain the image of having the most culturally sensitive student body.

The most recent incident that brought Duke national attention was the fraternity Kappa Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated's party entitled "Asia Prime." For the event, guests were invited to dress according to the "Asian culture." Duke's Asian Student Association (ASA) heard about the fraternity-sorority mixer and approached the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL) with concerns about the racially-focused, tactless theme of the social. After having the gathering brought to their attention, the OFSL asked Kappa Sigma to cancel the event. The fraternity replied to the request by altering the theme of the party from Asian to "international." However, students still dressed according to stereotypically-Asian images, wearing the costumes of sumo wrestlers, rice farmers, and geishas.

Once photographs from the event were published, mass uproars against what was coined "racist rager" initiated. Nationally and locally, for days "racist rager" was all any student or administrator could discuss. Some argued that the event was only an insensitive joke that should be forgiven and forgotten, not expanded to the level of infamy that it was obtaining. To the popular claims that the students simply could not "take a joke," one student wisely replied "Some people have just never had to take a joke," unlike minority groups (Botella 2013). In light of the analysis of race in the United States of America conducted in the first chapter, this reply has some unassailable foundation. In our country, the only non-qualified, unhyphenated citizen is the distantly-immigrated, white American. Whiteness is the norm from which every other group is marginalized.

This one instance of cultural tactlessness does not define Duke University or its students, but it does demonstrate the cultural stressors that exist on this campus. On September 24, 2012, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs sent an email to the student body entitled “Recent Incidents” that stated:

*In the past several weeks, there have been a number of incidents on campus targeting students based on their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality and/or religion. Scrawling hurtful language across a door, yelling out a discriminatory epithet, and defaming a neighbor’s private property are examples of the complaints that have been reported. The intolerance is troubling. Duke is dedicated to helping students of all backgrounds become comfortable and competent engaging positively and constructively with people of different cultures, beliefs and perspectives.*

(Email, September 24, 2012)

Despite the level of sophistication and education at this university, instances of prejudice occur. As an institution, Duke aims to embed knowledge that its students can use to be successful young adults in the world outside of its walls. Duke’s graduation requirement for two courses that demonstrate “cross-cultural inquiry” asserts the university’s attempt to make their students more culturally aware within our globalized world. Yet, the ignorance and insensitivity still persists.

September 28, 2012, I attended an event at the Center for Multicultural Affairs (CMA) entitled “Culture Clash.” Every event in this series intends to bring together students from particular denominations or student groups in order to discuss their concerns in the presence of a mediator. On the date mentioned, the topic of interest was the multicultural. Only three students

attended the event. Of all three, one African American student's accounts were most compelling. This young woman did not identify or classify as multicultural; both of her parents were African American. Despite this, she believed she was often seen as multicultural because of her intellect. She explained that her family moved a lot throughout her childhood, but no matter where she went her peers asked if she was mixed. Because of her knowledge and poise, others thought that one of her parents had to be White. She believed her peers were thinking "You're smarter than me so you must be half of me" (Quote, September 28, 2012). For whomever asked this young woman about her non-existent, White background, her intelligence did not fit their perception of the Black race. Accordingly, in their minds, she could not be only Black. This exemplifies my exact concerns about the idea of "doing race" in Markus and Moya's work. When this student did not "do" her race according to preconceived standards, others attempted to position her within another racial group. Instead of questioning their racialized beliefs, they tried to justify them to the best of their ability.

In an interview with one administrator and scholar at Duke University, he reflected on thoughts of Black, intellectual inferiority. Knowing the intimate details of Duke's admission, he assured me that each of the 1,705 students accepted each year are hand-selected for many different reasons. He acknowledged that some of the best students of one racial group may have lower average test scores than those of another. To explain this phenomenon, the administrator stated that although the top ten percent of applicants and the top two percent of every racial group are admitted, sometimes the top two percent of the minority groups, particularly Blacks and Latinos, will be at the bottom at the overall ten percent (Interview, February 19, 2013). Due to the unequal spread of opportunities and resources in the nation, these occurrences could not be controlled. On the other hand, what he also emphasized was that those statistical differences

were only emphasized with minority groups. With claims of “reverse racism” demanding the abolition of Affirmative Action, few consider that athletic capability, musical talent, alumni connections, and even international status are weighted in the selections process. Not many, if any citizens reference these factors as sources of unfair advantages during the admissions process, only race. In all of these examples, race was the point of contention and dilemma.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MY FIELD SITE**

This chapter tackled many approaches to understanding the current state of the multicultural nationally and locally. The segment began by denoting the lack of language to define the multicultural and the implications of its absence. Seeing one’s identity reaffirmed its recognition and acceptability. The reduction of some multicultural to “other” reaffirmed their image as “different.” The students and the people around them attempted to find the multicultural’s label-of-best fit in ways that could engender the double consciousness that Du Bois believed haunted African Americans. The powerful and unquestioned nature of racial thought manufactured a structure in which the multicultural were pressured to define themselves, but the limitations of stereotypes within the system’s design sometimes made finding that definition almost impossible. The testimonies of my interviewees show that Duke is a small vessel of all the competing factors affecting one’s description of the self in the United States.

On the other hand, what makes Duke distinctive as my field site is the persistence of ignorance in a framework of excellence. Similar to other universities, Duke provides its students with ample opportunities to learn about cultural differences and eliminate the prejudices they may have carried with them into the university. Despite some of those chances being distinct to Duke, such as Duke Engage, cultural biases within the student body persist. Persons who obtain

a higher education tend to be more liberal, but the design of college has not perfectly eliminated the centuries of racialized thought that is embedded in American culture. This not only demonstrates the clout of our established language and thought but shows why Duke University was the perfect field site to study the factors affecting the formulation of multicultural identity.

College is a place where young adults craft and experiment with their identities. In any institution as scholastically renowned as Duke University, any obstacles to multicultural identity construction that appear (which in this instance were language and racialized theory) must be the most potent. Thus, my field site helped me determine what topics demanded the most analysis in this project. While these first two chapters investigate the elements impacting the multicultural, how the students confronted the obstructions on their road to self-determination proved most telling about the life and identity for the multicultural.

# CHAPTER THREE

## MIXED UP NOT MESSED UP

### INITIAL SCHOLARLY RESEARCH AND WHAT PROVED TO BE

No one can deny that the multicultural face many potential sources of identity conflict. With policy and history having already molded the template for race and culture, with the terms' being bendable but not easily broken, and with their current liminal state, many variables impact the formulation of identity for the multicultural. The weight of the listed factors could bear down on any individual. Thus, coming across obstacles in self-determination would appear natural. Yet, some scholars have seen the culturally diverse as facing particular difficulties characteristic to them alone. When I first began this research project, I wanted to understand why this perception of conflict existed and what setbacks did the multicultural face as they struggled to define themselves.

Some obstacles the multicultural faced did not surprise me. After reading about and the strict characterizations of minority groups and the inexistence of any descriptions for White Americans, students' references to nationally conflicting racial and cultural stereotypes should have appeared (Perry 2001). However, I had not considered some of the motifs that appeared during my discussions. Recurring themes included the influence of Censuses and the ominous "box," demonstrating the deficiency of today's language to characterize the multicultural and making them comparable to the "other" of science fiction films and novels (Nama 2008).

As mentioned in the introduction, with my initial point of scholarly essay involving conflict, explicitly asking about the benefits of being multicultural did not cross my mind until Andrew identified my omission. Despite my lack of questioning, positive aspects of being

multicultural arose in almost every conversation I had during my research. Hearing the paybacks of being multicultural while asking about the drawbacks makes references to strengths even more significant. Witnessing the appreciation my interviewees had for their multiculturalism revealed what makes the multicultural identity distinct: not its pitfalls, but its flexibility, resilience and acceptance.

French and Kenyan student, Sophia, was aware of the “identity crises” associated with the multicultural. When asked if there was anything she wanted to emphasize at the end of my interview with her, she stated:

*I think that...generally, people might think that if you are ‘multiracial,’ you might be like confused with where you’re from. You know what I mean? And I just want to clear that for many people that’s not an issue. For some people, it’s true that...they’re not sure with which culture to identify, if they’re closer to one culture or another, but ...at least in my case, my parents were so good in bringing me up with both cultures that I feel so comfortable with them that I don’t feel confused at all. I feel very comfortable with who I am. (Interview, September 16, 2012, original emphasis from interview)*

This student’s statement denounces literary claims that ignited my initial research questions.

Conflict was not the potent, overarching feature of my interviewees’ lives despite the claims scholars Du Bois and Spencer presented in their works (citation) . Du Bois’s work presented the theory of the “double consciousness”: two cultural sets of ideals and values encased in one body, causing an identity conflict. Spencer challenges the need for

any multiracial or multicultural category, stating its basis is biological, racial fallacies and believing a new category would render minority groups even more powerless in the current paradigms of the United States. These theories demonstrate two potential sources of conflict for the multicultural: the “fallacies” of race and potentially conflicting cultural values. These two authors show how one could interpret multiculturalism itself as a source of identity conflict. Nonetheless, as Sophia’s quote shows, to her, being multicultural was not a source of dilemma but a gift, like the second-sight and American music that resulted from African Americans’ years of discrimination (Du Bois 1903). Due to their different cultural backgrounds, Sophia’s parents emphasized exposing their daughters to the diversity of the world, traveling with them and exposing them to alternative ways of life, showing Sophia how much there was to learn about the global population. Whenever I asked her about any pressures she felt to identify herself in a particular way or about any difficulties she faced in the creation of her identity, she could state none. This international student only felt confusion whenever someone attempted to associate her more with one culture, such as asking her to speak French rather than Swahili. To maintain confident as others attempted to push her towards more French or Kenyan behavior, to clearly denote her appreciation for other cultures, this student had to build some form of strength from her background. The rest of the interviews that will be referenced in this chapter will further demonstrate that multicultural strength.

## **ACCEPTANCE AND STRENGTH: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC VIEW OF THE GIFTS OF THE MULTICULTURAL**

Andrew embodied potency in understanding. Hearing this young man, with understanding and composure, discuss his Caucasian grandfather who told him how he could not succeed as a half Asian man in a world with predominantly White power-holders left me in awe. With such simplicity, he stated:

*I may hate White institutions and I may hate Asian institutions but I can't hate them because they're part of my own self. That would mean I hate part of me and my heritage... It's kind of like a revolving gun...in that...making a movement towards the multicultural perspective, it's a movement against either your father or your mother or the denial of... your heritage...you don't have a solution but that's kind of the best part. Everyone else is looking for that solution. (Interview, September 10, 2012)*

For Andrew, as a person in the middle, he may not agree with every aspect of his parent's individual cultures, but hating those components of his heritage was not the solution. He could not despise what made him the person that he is today. While Sophia was able to more easily blend her cultures together, Andrew had to balance the conflicting elements of his psyche and his heritage. For him, this equilibrium placed the multicultural at an advantage over those who identify with one cultural or racial group. When a set path seems correct, goals seem more tangible and straightforward, making failures to adhere to a particular standard feel more traumatizing.

Those who view life in this way fail to realize that no one is truly "monocultural." No one set of beliefs or values are correct and cultural "purity" does not exist. Cultures are collections of diverse elements of life paved together over time. As American author Robert Rodriguez pushes his readers to understand in *Brown*, our globalized world becomes more "brown" and less

Black and White everyday (Rodriguez 2002). Those who feel as if they belong to one racial group must realize that their way of life honed details from every cultural group with which their ancestors crossed paths. At some point, their predecessors had to cross cultural lines.

By being multicultural, Andrew believed:

*...you have a greater awareness of what really belonging is.*

*Belonging isn't just to one group, or one race, or one country. It's more than that and it's not just that I'm beating you in a race; it's more like... [pause]...we're all in this together . . . To think one thing is wrong is detrimental. To think one thing is right, the other thing is wrong...if you do things in that manner then you're going to be wrong one day or another and that becomes you're placing a limit. (Interview, September 10, 2012)*

Andrew saw the light of being multicultural in his ability to see the whole rather than the individual. He recognized the connectivity of the human population, releasing him from the desire to uphold the standards of any one group. He saw the collective rather than the individual. Even if he did not agree with someone, he could appreciate them since they came from someone of the *human* race, not just one racial classification. This shows both his ability to stay true to his own beliefs and to appreciate viewpoints other than his own. With the plethora of potential sources of identity crisis that appeared in Andrew's life, his ability to overcome and understand is a feat within itself.

Another student who appeared to have obtained an understanding of "true belonging" was Panamanian and Black student, Miurel. The more Miurel became aware of her being "half" and not belonging to any one group, the more she realized she did not need to have cultural

similarities with her friends. She believed that the desire to surround oneself with comparable groups was natural. However, being multicultural “desensitized” her to that communal need (Interview, September 8, 2012). Identifying with the friends she made was no longer necessary for Miurel. This way of thinking parallels Andrew’s notion of “true belonging” because she established friendships based on commonalities other than race or culture. Analogous to Andrew, Miurel saw the whole rather than individual traits and qualities.

When asked about Black culture, both Miurel and David shared some stereotypical associations, such as ideas of being “ghetto” and bad influences. However, those associations permeated through history first, implanting themselves in the minds of these students. Despite both their claims to laying significance with “who” people were, not “what,” they still could not overcome the tendency to lay significance with a person’s “what” (Interviews, September 9, 2012).

Due to the national constructs of racial and cultural thought that were shown in the first chapter, these students experienced times when they felt as if peers viewed them critically based on their background, making them feel as if they were inadequately “performing” their race or culture. From the moment they encountered American thought, the influence from their environment to act or think a particular way had already seeped through. Although these students would fight the urge to categorize others the way they had been, they could not stop themselves completely. However, when my interviewees did find themselves trying to categorize or label an individual, they did not feel as if it was due to the urge to “box” people up, but out of a curiosity to understand and learn about other cultures.

Christian believed multicultural folk had a “smaller margin of error” with matters pertaining to their acceptance (Interview, September 6, 2012). He felt as if the multicultural

faced more pressure to fit pre-established templates for being. To this student, as only “half,” if he or any other multicultural individuals comported themselves contrary to the established “norm” for their cultural group, they would more quickly be deemed “different” or an “outsider.” Yet, at the end of our interview, the only comment Christian wanted to add was that he believed the multicultural should stay strong, be decisive, and stand up for what they believe, even if their beliefs do not agree with those around them. This demonstrates the same independence and resilience seen in Andrew and during many of my other interviews. While Andrew expressed an appreciation for cultural diversity through his understanding and patience and Miurel through her cultural disregard, Christian showed his through cultural curiosity. He referenced how frequently he finds himself asking “what are you,” not in order to categorize but to obtain knowledge. Culture intrigued him.

Sophia, Andrew, and Christian were not the only students who felt this way. During his interview, Sydney stated his life experiences as a Dominican and African American man helped him with “...understanding people’s mindsets and what people want too and just viewing those different cultures and going outside of my small little neighborhood ...” (Interview, September 1, 2012). Spending time in the Dominican Republic as a young child and returning to the United States helped Sydney appreciate and value the diversity to which he has been exposed. He too felt as if his questions about other people’s ethnicities stemmed from curiosity and desire to understand “where they’re coming from” (Interview, September 1, 2012). Sydney was not interested in categories themselves but the individuals who compiled them. When I asked him the final question about what he would want to add to the interview, he stated he was proud of who he had become and he “wouldn’t change it for anything” (Interview, September 1, 2012).

Lizete struggled to find her place in a nation without the “coloured” category to which she was accustomed. She missed the culture of the coloured population in Mozambique, but this did not deter her from learning more about the new cultures that appeared in her life at Duke (Interview, September 21, 2013). She became enamored with cultures to which she had never been exposed, particularly the Latino culture. The middle-class and the poor, the Afrikaans and the coloured, the Portuguese and the South African—to Lizete, this breath of diversity that her family represented allowed her to “understand the world better” and amend how she approaches people from different backgrounds accordingly. She realized that “everyone has a story” to which she should be “sensitive” and attempt to understand. While she attempted to understand others, Lizete yearned for the day that others took the same effort to learn more her and the multicultural. This international student wishes for the day that the multicultural will be seen as “normal” rather than earthshattering or amazing to people who have not been exposed to cultural diversity. Yet, that did not prevent Lizete from being the strong, accepting individual she has become.

An Antiguan and Jamaican student, Sarah, and a Nigerian and White student, Segun, could not recall experiencing any contentions as they established their identity. As with Sophia, the only issue Sarah was when someone attempted to clump her within a group she considered different from her own, particularly with African Americans. To this woman, being African American entails behavior and values that differ from her West Indian culture. Black was her racial identity, referencing only physical traits. Sarah disliked when these distinctions were not made, not that she had to make them (Interview, September 8, 2012).

In Oregon, Segun distinctions between individuals who appeared racially black were rarely made. During our interview, he quoted rapper Childish Gambino stating, “White kids get

to wear whatever hat they want when it comes to black kids, one size fits all” (Interview, September 23, 2012) . Scholarly, this reference reminded me of my analysis of Perry’s work “White Means Never Having to Say You’re Ethnic” in the first chapter. In this article, Perry analyzed the phenomenon of White Americans being seen as the normal, “cultureless” group in the United States (2001). Without being seen as having a culture, they could not have cultural standards to uphold. Referencing this back to Segun’s lyrical quote, Segun felt as if, as a man who identified as Black, he was expected to comport himself a particular way. Being only “half” Black meant he was not African enough to some students who boggled him with their endless references to lack of melanin in his skin. Sarah and Segun knew who they were; when others attempted to fit them under one “hat” was when conflict arose. Yet, both felt as if they were more culturally aware and appreciated diversity because of their background, even when others attempted to underscore their individuality.

Deja had many tensions that arose from her multiculturalism, from internal feelings of not acting or looking Black or White enough to the times her classmates questioned why she looked so different from her Caucasian mother. Not resembling her mother did not bother her until her peers’ negatively reacted towards their differences. When asked about the issues she faced as a mixed student, Deja replied “I never really had an issue with accepting both sides...[after] coming to Duke I don’t really acknowledge my White side as much as I used to because it’s easier...since I look black...that’s what society puts on me anyway” (Interview, September 7, 2012). An important phrase appears in this quote: “what society puts on me.” Deja felt as if society pushed her towards one side of her identity, making one side of her culture seem more acceptable than the other. She identified as Black and White openly and confidently, but ideas about what those labels entailed influenced Deja enough that she questioned her

identity. She doubted herself when she tried to determine the basis for her feelings of not-belonging.

The student noted that:

*At home, I always felt like I belonged in my family even though sometimes I didn't look like them in public. That was hard because no one thought my mom would look like that but, like, I always felt it was ok for our family to be how it was... (Interview, September 7, 2012)*

In public Deja began to distinguish oddities within her family; in public this multicultural woman differentiated peculiarities in her background that she did not find peculiar within the confinements of her home.

Jessica similarly felt pressure to self-identify in a particular way but her pressure was not only peer-related but political. Having a Brazilian and Iraqi father with West Indian influences and a Spanish and Filipino mother, the simplest way for this student to identify herself was “multicultural” (Interview, September 11, 2012). When she did elaborate on her background, in her previous schools, Jessica only mentioned three of the four nationalities in her family: Filipino, Spanish and Brazilian. As a young girl, the fear of exclusion and discrimination inhibited this student from acknowledging that she had Iraqi roots.

Moreover, in a small, southeastern, Catholic high school, Jessica always felt as if her classmates were always attempting to place her into a neat box, but the headings they wanted to use were not as inclusive as her background. If she said, “my mother is Filipino and Spanish and my father is Brazilian,” her peers would reply, “So, ok... that’s like two of three that are like related to Spanish-speaking people [ignoring the fact that Brazilians are not Spanish-speaking] so you’re Hispanic!” If they were capable of making such broad generalizations about the aspects

of her background that she did disclose, this student's fear that the students around her would associate stereotypes about the Middle East—terrorism, injustice, female repression—with her was understandable. To her classmates, despite her characteristically Middle Eastern last name, her Iraqi background did not exist. As refugees from Iraq, Jessica's paternal family had not resided in that nation for many generations, but this was not the reasoning behind her disregard for this side of her family in the public sphere. The events of September 11, 2001, and the tendency to homogenize was the explanation.

However, with time, even if the stigmas did not disappear nationally, the people around Jessica became more culturally aware and diversified. Being “mixed” was no longer incomprehensible as it was with her high school classmates; the Duke students around her understand how broad the spectrum of culture can truly be. As she felt less fear and more acceptance, her confidence in her multicultural identity expanded. Jessica admitted “Because of the environment I grew up in I was...I guess...reared to think a certain way so it was putting people in categories...” Similar to other multicultural students, categorizations and boxes appeared so prevalently in Jessica's life that she could not fight the urge to label the people around her, despite being incorrectly categorized countless times in her lifetime. Despite this, with time, the significance of those categories disappeared. Just as with Miurel and other interviewees, she no longer cared “what” someone was and if she was able to identify with that “what;” what mattered to her was “who” the person was.

## ANALYSIS

Throughout the previous chapters of this research project, a thread of external sources of conflict for the multicultural revealed itself. Hitherto, few constructive ideas about the multicultural have been offered. Not until my eighth interview, which was with Andrew, did I explicitly ask questions about and start to research ideas that did not circulate potential sources of conflict. Family and peer relations, original hometowns, self-identifying issues, past pressures, contradicting self-identity versus identification—all of these components of my interviewees' lives were questioned but not what slowly became illuminated as more important to them: the benefits of being multicultural. The arrival of these profits in conversation confirms the importance of reflecting upon all of the instances that these advantages arose.

Almost universally, the student that I interviewed felt as if being multicultural made them more culturally aware and accepting of the diversity around them. Some, such as Sarah, Sophia and Jessica deemed the need to categorize “natural.” Yet, their inability to categorize themselves on a national level did not deteriorate the strength they found in their established identity.

The attributes of the multicultural reflect Robert B. Putnam's principle of bridging social capital. In his work *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam defines social capital as “social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity,” or the benefits of that community (Putnam 2000: 21). Networks could be used for benevolent or malicious purposes, but what Putnam deemed the most significant component of social capital was the “distinction between *bridging* (or inclusive) and *bonding* (or exclusive)” (22). He distinguished these two dimensions of social capital by stating:

Some forms of social capital are...inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups...Other networks are outward

looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages... Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity... Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion... Bonding social capital is... good for 'getting by,' but bridging social capital is crucial for 'getting ahead.' (Putnam 2000: 22-23).

Upon analysis of the above quote, the fact that strengths of the multicultural embody the bridging of social capital will become clear. According to Putnam, bonding occurs within an established network. Such links can be culturally, professionally, or family based. On the other side, bridging entails creating bonds across "social cleavages," or defined groups of people. A bond can only take a person as far as the most advanced person within the group. A bridge has the potential to carry an individual beyond the limitations of their designated entity, providing them with advantages their own unit may not have been able to provide.

Applying this understanding of social capital to the multicultural, the students that I interviewed had been positioned into many varying racial and cultural categories during their lifetimes. Sometimes those labels created perceptions of the young men and women that were not factual, leading to their desire to separate themselves from their label's connotations. Many times the externally and internally reaffirmed nature of classification made my interviewees feel pressured to live their lives according to the standards that power-holders and history had created. Despite these sources of identity conflict, the multicultural students I interviewed were able to form bridges across the limits of their predetermined networks. They were able to seal the "cleavages" of their identity and

communities in such a way that confidence and resilience resulted. The multicultural pushed themselves beyond the restrictions of their communities and of the racial and cultural theory of the United States to the point they no longer needed to identify with the persons surrounding them; they knew who they were whether others did or not.

## CONCLUSION

The spark of interest that ignited this thesis project was a Race Card with six simple words: “My son is double, not half.” This Race Card presented a play-on-words that led me to contemplate the ways I identify myself. I not only contemplated internal factors at play but those outside of my control. What I did not know when I began my research that I now understand is the complex mesh of elements influencing who we are and who we think we are.

Despite the positive outlook of my stimulus for research, prevailing ideals of cultural and racial theory quickly shifted my focus from the “double,” holistic, confident creation of multicultural identity to the conflicting, controversial, culture-clashing potential for conflict in obtaining the feat of self-identification. Associations of a multicultural identity or way of life with identity issues moved my track-of-thought and processing, leading to my establishment of questions that circulated crisis. One of preliminary sources, *The Soul of Black Folks*, had highlighted positive consequences of the “veil” that separated African Americans from their White counterparts. Yet, with noticeable ease, my questions evolved. The effortlessness with which such a shift occurred is understandable when one considers the fact that the nature of the United States’ racial ideology presents a possibility for conflict. With hundreds of years of government, policy and individual stereotypes strengthening the base on which race (as we know it today) was built, tackling this obstacle would appear impossible.

Chapter one demonstrates that, despite its unquestioned, “natural” perception in this nation, race has developed over the years. Despite its malleable history, strict definitions of racial groups still persist, establishing pressure to fit the molds that become more solidified in the minds of our community with each passing year. New categories such as “Hispanic” were added to the list of recognized groups within the racial structure of the United States. However, Nixon’s

presidential administration supported and crafted the term, speeding its acceptance and usage (Rodriguez 2002). Due to the level of difficulty to alter racial ideology in this nation, culture became my means of understanding the students that I interviewed. Culture allotted for change, growth, and adoption—characteristics that could not be so easily associated with race. Culture allows for alterations and differences, making it more reflective of the multicultural. By definition, the multicultural are pluralistic in their beliefs and practices. Unlike other terms, the label “multicultural” allows less individuality to be lost with its usage. Dissimilar to ideas of how to “act” a race, there is no one way to be multicultural. Furthermore, similar to culture, identity can develop, grow, change, and be adopted, making the parallels between identity and culture more constructive towards determining their relationship with culturally diverse individuals.

In spite of my cultural focus, race still played a significant role in the lives of all the students with whom I spoke. Thus, racialized theory still had to be considered. Although no undergraduate reported an instance in which a selection directly impacted his or being, the omnipotent “boxes” that appeared on surveys and Censuses determined what students deemed appropriate ways of identifying themselves. For the multicultural, a new category was not as easily created nor accepted as it was for Hispanics, placing them in the category of “other” like the creatures of a Science Fiction novel. Some of my interviewees yearned for the day they would no longer be seen as “different.” Lizete referenced the frequency with which knowledge of her cultural background was greeted “oos” and “awes.” This student stated she would appreciate the day the multicultural were seen as “normal,” like everyone else (Interview, September 21, 2012).

The multicultural faced the task of self-identification in an environment that lacked the language to define them and forced them into the confinements of existing categories. Potential

sources of identity conflict surrounded the multicultural, causing my research questions to circulate around those obstacles. Not until my eighth interview, with the student Andrew, did the light of the multicultural identity come back into focus within my research. Regardless of having lived the life of the multicultural, despite feeling the positivity of my cultural background, I too had fallen into the trap of seeing multiculturalism as a potential source of conflict rather than what it really was: a source of strength, open-mindedness, and cultural awareness. Language creates the basis for identity and the ability to define the self in the face of others. By bridging the social capital of their individual cultures, the multicultural developed the means to overcome the need to fit a label. They were confident in their identity without a category. Outsiders and internal pressures had attempted to confine my interviewees with pre-established containers all of their lives. They did not need another means of confining themselves. Their confidence does not mean the multicultural do not crave a category. As all human beings are, the multicultural are complicated and contradictory. Their consistent usage of established labels demonstrates their desire to be recognized one way or another so that they can be seen as “normal.” What their self-awareness and assurance does do is eradicate the *need* to have a category because they have experienced how limiting classifications can be.

This thesis reveals the limitations of attempts to categorize the people around us, even ourselves. Highlighting the complexity of one denomination demonstrated the flaw in believing that anyone could completely fit a mold. As the undergraduates with whom I spoke affirmed, racial and cultural questions should be asked in order to understand, not to confine. For future scholars who attempt to better understand the identity, mannerisms or beliefs of any particular group of people, I challenge them to inquire and contend about every theory they come across, to obtain their own understanding as I have done. Within the field of multiculturalism, deeper

understanding of the way the culturally diverse establish bridges of social capital can still be further analyzed, to one day possibly build such bridges across every cultural network of this nation, or even the world.

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