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Growing Up On Burritos and Black-Eyed Peas: An Autoethnography of Multiracial Identity Development

Marie Bruner

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, GROWING UP ON BURRITOS AND BLACK-EYED PEAS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, by MARIE CASTRO BRUNER, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairpersons, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

GROWING UP ON BURRITOS AND BLACK-EYED PEAS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

Marie Castro Bruner

The immigration debate is not new to the United States; however, today's heated discussions include strong anti-Mexican sentiments (Bean & Stone, 2012; Hughey, 2012). As Americans attempt to secure borders in an effort to insure safety and economic security, current legislation includes elements of racial profiling against Mexicans that could extend to those who possess varying levels of Mexican blood since physical characteristics tend to guide racial labeling (Aoki & Johnson, 2009; Bernal, 2002; Fernandez, 2002; Quiñones et al, 2011). As an individual of Mexican and White bloodlines, racial categorization has resulted in internal struggles and social dilemmas for me.

The purpose of this dissertation was to gain understanding of my personal multiracial identity development within various social contexts; this study fulfills the requests of theorists seeking to understand multiracial identity development through self-analysis over a lifetime (Binning et al, 2009; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Cheng & Lee, 2009; Miville et al, 2005). This qualitative dissertation used critical autoethnography as its methodology and theories of multiracial identity (Poston, 1990; Root, 1996; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009) and LatCrit (Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Tate, 1997; Valdes, 1997; Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005) while considering the impact of Whiteness Studies (Jay, 2005; Jeffries, 2012; Yeung, Spanierman & Landrum-Brown, 2013), and the cultural process of naming (Boris, 2005). The research questions guiding this dissertation were: How have I internalized and

interpreted encounters related to racial identification, and what does being multiracial mean to me?

The presentation of findings included narrative analysis of visual and audio data sets located on a personal website that accompanies this study; online presentation of this study provides an opportunity to explore multiracial identity development in a space that has potential for impacting change due to popularity and accessibility (Bamford, 2005; Lang, 2002; Lange, 2008). Findings revealed complexities and fluidity in multiracial identity development as well as problems of self-identifying as monoracial. The significance of this study is that it will contribute to ongoing discussions of multiracial identity development as well as add to the growing body of literature related to LatCrit Theory, Whiteness Studies, and autoethnographic studies.

GROWING UP ON BURRITOS AND BLACK-EYED PEAS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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A Dissertation

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study


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Although there have been many changes in our world with respect to issues linked to race and ethnicity, my personal experiences reveal that race and ethnic heritage continue to play significant roles in numerous arenas. In my occupation as a multiracial teacher with Mexican and White roots, each year I am asked to ascribe myself to racial categories for demographic purposes within the school system in which I teach. Each year, I encounter the question of my racial identity and not until recently was the multiracial category made available to me. I feel conflicted when I think about demographics and my profession, because I am unsure if my employment is a result of filling the Hispanic quota that may exist within my school system. My maiden name is Castro, my skin is brown, and I teach Spanish; I completely understand when others assume that I am Hispanic and disregard my White ancestry. I have often wondered if professional opportunities are given to or denied me based upon my race, and I continue to wrestle with the idea of being asked to identify myself racially, especially since I am a conglomeration of races. From enrolling in graduate school to self-identifying for school system demographics, my encounters with documents that ask me to identify my race continue to trouble me. Recently, I went to the doctor's office for a check-up and was informed by office personnel that I needed to complete a new form. I laughed when I received the form because it was a racial alignment form that specifically

delineated in only one way: Hispanic or Non-Hispanic. I amended the form to suit my multiracial needs and asked the office personnel why this form was needed. The young woman shrugged and told me that it was needed for new medical record software. I wondered why the need to focus specifically on Hispanic background and whether or not there were any motives behind the request that might have political, medical, or financial undertones; I also noted that I was the only person in the waiting room who received the form. Everyone else looked White. My medical visit reminded me that race continues to be used to sort and categorize me. Each time that I am asked to racially identify on demographic documents, I struggle with internal turmoil resulting from questions that may not allow me to align me with both of my parents. Sometimes I am White, and only White. Sometimes I am Hispanic, and only Hispanic. Sometimes I am multiracial with the ability to "check all that apply". My inability to choose does not always depend upon me, rather the inconsistent wording among forms that narrow or widen the choices that I am allowed to make.

Prior to this study, my belief system related to race included: (1) a "color blind" mentality that did not evaluate people based upon skin color or race, (2) a "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" mentality in a world with structural inequities that enable some easier access than others, and (3) a pious indignation toward my siblings when they thought that we were objects of racism. As I have delved into the literature related to Critical Race Theory, colorism (the value of light skin over dark skin for people of color), and multiracial identity development, I have come to terms with my naiveté and insensitivity. American culture has categorized people by race and has done so since the early 1900s when immigrants converged at Ellis Island (Hoerder, 2009). At the beginning

of the twentieth century, a play opened on Broadway entitled *The Melting Pot* that reflected the mindset of immigrants coming from Europe; it was authored by a Jewish man from England who believed in the promise of finding a better life and blending into this country, socially and politically (Booth, 1998). The wave of immigrants from Europe in the early 1900's has been compared to the current flood of migrants from Latin American, complete with societal and political issues that include immigrants hoping for a better life and citizens concerned about their rights and privileges (Hawley, 2010). Latinos today experience many of the same issues related to acceptance and segregation that early American immigrants endured (Markert, 2010). Even though I want to believe that racial factors do not play a role in education, family, politics, or society, there are far too many studies and editorials that purport the contrary (Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Hawley, 2010; Simpkins, O'Donnell, Delgado, & Becnel, 2011). This study provided me an opportunity to investigate the degree to which perceived racism impacted my multiracial identity development.

The presence of Mexicans and other persons of Latin-American origin (Latinos) living in the United States continues to be a sensitive political issue and headlines reflect the existing turmoil. Journalists, politicians, and American citizens argue about laws that promote racial profiling, English as a Second Language (ESL) in schools, and employment issues related to illegal immigrant hiring (DeGenova & Ramos-Zayas, 2005; Donato & Sisk, 2011; Gonzalez, 2003; Jones, 2007). In April 2010, Arizona passed a law (SB1070) that compelled police officers to stop individuals who looked Hispanic, if the law enforcers believed that suspicious-looking individuals may be in this country illegally and/or are criminally inclined. Law officials could demand documentation based

upon subjective assessments of physical appearance. Arizona's law sparked a national debate, and other states attempt to pass similar legislation even though Arizona's controversial law was challenged by the Supreme Court. The current economic struggle fuels debates about employment, and some individuals believe that jobs held by "Mexicans" and current hiring procedures are an essential part of our nation's downward economic spiral. Immigrants earn money in the U.S. and send it to families across the border. The "border" presents another issue, invoking images of searchlights and "wetbacks" crawling under fences while dodging law enforcement. My surname and physical appearance have prompted people who I consider to be friends to jokingly ask me to show them my green card. Some "friends" have touched my back and asked if it were still wet from my swim while others have questioned me about my steady diet of tacos and refried beans. I marvel at the freedom that some people possess to denigrate; they express racially derogative thoughts to me or about me without notable regard for how I may receive or perceive their comments. Sadly, many of my acquaintances talk about where "Mexicans" should go (or better stated, go back to), how English only should be spoken in this country, and how much stronger border control should be even though they are aware of my Mexican heritage. My inner turmoil is tremendous, and I am conflicted when people share their very strong opinions in my presence, not because I do not understand employment frustration or legal issues, but because my father is Mexican. I am Mexican.

Identity issues prevail as I continue to work through my upbringing and being Mexican is only one dimension of who I am. I am also the daughter of Daisy Mae, a woman who grew up in Middle Georgia as the daughter of a sharecropper. My maternal

cultural background includes the Confederate flag, cornbread and grits, and a strong Southern drawl. Conflict does not even begin to describe my feelings when my parental cultures clashed, and I was forced to align myself racially with only one of my parents. Yet, as a child, I rarely encountered prejudice because I grew up on military bases around the world and the schools I attended were filled with multiracial children. Occasionally, however, we were stationed in a place in which we were anomalies, and I recall a child in my first grade class asking me about my "used to be momma" since my mother and I looked nothing alike. Standardized testing in school did not present a problem for me until high school because teachers pre-selected racial categories for students and my academic record indicated that I was White. Truth be told, I was and am neither White nor Mexican. I was and am multiracial.

Identity Crisis

I was born on September 20, 1959 and have lived over half a century in this world; my journey in this life has been one filled with accomplishments, struggles, hopes, and disappointments. I have numerous identities: I am a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, a teacher, a colleague, and a friend, to name a few. Some of my titles are results of personal choices while others are the result of being born into my particular family. Growing up, I always thought that my family experiences were different than those around me because both my parents spoke English with distinguishable accents that placed them within a particular ethnic group or a specific geographic region. I enjoy sharing my family stories with others and I sprinkle my renditions of my parents' accents in my dramatic presentations for comedic purposes. My comedic monologues begin with an introduction about my background; I lead with, "My daddy's name is Timoteo Castro

and my momma's name is Daisy Mae. I am Mexican, Indian, Irish, Scottish, French and German with two different kinds of Indian. My father speaks with a thick Mexican accent and my mother drawls like a gal from the Deep South. Basically, I'm a Heinz 57 mutt". Lately, I have come to realize that my efforts at comedy were and are my attempts to make meaning of the experiences that shaped and continue to mold my evolving multiracial identity.

As a young adult, I wanted to share my variegated experiences in a children's book entitled "Growing Up on Burritos and Black-eyed Peas". Little did I know that I would use my title to pen my dissertation. I believe that my experiences, though seemingly unique, may be able to contribute to the growing conversations of what it means to be multiracial. Prior to this study, I was offended when conversations about race were used as an excuse for performance or absence of performance or as a reason for accepting or rejecting an individual. I believed myself to be above what I considered promotion of stereotypes and discrimination. I scoffed at my siblings who were certain that they were viewed through an anti-Hispanic lens. Whenever I did experience rejection or alienation in my life, I believed that it came from other factors such as economic status or my struggle with obesity. I determined that my insecurities in identity development came from sources other than race. I was a nominal Mexican like some people are nominal Christians; possessing an affiliation based upon title without change in lifestyle or experience as a result of the connection. I chose to view the world as though it were void of racism. Recently, the presence of anti-Hispanic sentiments and legislation as well as conversations and situations related to being multiracial has caused me to evaluate the role race plays in my life. I want to understand why race has become an issue on public

documents such as my medical records and why being Hispanic is a specific delineation on a recent form request. I want to know if others view me differently for having Mexican blood flow through my veins. I want to understand my multiracial experience so that I can share it and help others understand those who do not fit into singular racial categories.

Choosing to investigate encounters that shape my multiracial identity is my attempt not only to make meaning of my experiences, but to enlighten those who place me and others like me in awkward and, at times, stressful situations. I never know how to respond to racially derogatory comments. I often wonder if the derisive people know my racial background and whether or not it even matters to them. I ponder if their desire is to purposefully wound me and put me in my societal place. I contemplate whether or not an emotional outburst would make a difference or if I should defer to golden silence. The teacher in me wants to educate and inform, but I usually choose to make jokes to ease the emotional discomfort I encounter. For most of my life, humor has been my attempt to eliminate awkwardness and cope with potentially painful situations that I am just now beginning to evaluate. Upon reflection, my judgmental attitude towards others who acutely sense racial prejudice and react with anger and/or frustration is simply a different response to bigotry; I chose humor. I now realize that I had not gone through life unscathed; I simply responded differently. Investigating my multiracial identity development helped me begin to discover why my inner struggle with racial issues and ignorance has perplexed and troubled me; my journey has only just begun.

Defining Multiracial

When discussing biracial and multiracial issues, it is important to provide definitions of these terms that are sometimes used interchangeably as well as explain why multiracial individuals may choose to self-identify on public documents such as the U.S. Census and standardized tests. According to Maria P. P. Root (1996), multiracial individuals are those "who are of two or more racial heritages. Thus it also includes biracial people" (p. xi). The definition of biracial includes a stronger sociological impact in that it refers to "a person whose parents are of two different *socially* designated racial groups" (Root, 1996, p. ix). According to Shih and Sanchez (2009), "people of multiracial backgrounds represent one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States" (p. 3). A multiracial identification is one that is challenged due to the inability to neatly sort and ascribe physiological, intellectual, and sociological traits to a group (Rockquemore, Brunsma & Delgado, 2009).

Terminology used in this study must be defined to avoid confusion. Within terminology distinctions that should be considered within this study, it is important to delineate the meanings of race and ethnicity. Although often used interchangeably, these terms are not synonymous. Whereas race relates to phenotype similarities and/or sensed prejudice, ethnicity delineates commonalities of language and culture (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Phenotype is the observable characteristics of genetic attributes such as skin, hair, and eye color. Outward appearance plays an important role in this study due to the exploration of socially ascribed constructs of being multiracial as it relates to an individual of the White race, regardless of ethnic background, with a race that has darker skin tones. What troubles me is that multiracial identity studies seem to focus on individuals with darker skin mixed with White rather than multiracial individuals who

have ethnic roots of White races such as German, Irish, and English, even though differences in physical appearance and dialect/accent may exist (Bernal, 2002; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, 2005). Ethnicity plays a key role in this study as well since my Mexican and Southern roots have unique languages and cultural traditions. Additionally, surname and family influence are factors in ascribing racial affiliation as well as gaining opportunities such as employment and college scholarship that favor a particular ethnic heritage.

The choices that multiracials make with respect to self-identification are changing society since data gathered from race affiliations fills statistical reports and seemingly plays a role in how successful an individual may or may not be. Looking at current multiracial identity issues being researched and their impact on various settings provides new insight since the demographic category itself is relatively new. Another issue that may not be easily addressed is how many multiracial individuals skewed earlier report results due to forced identification or non-identification. As one who continues to experience inner turmoil with respect to my multiracial identification, I can relate to the increasing number of individuals in this country who are self-identifying as multiracial and creating a paradigm shift in a monochromatic society that must be considered in politics and education (Winborn, 2009). Numerous studies exist that investigate the dilemmas of biracial children of mixed Black and White heritage (Rockquemore, 1998; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Rockquemore, Brunsma & Delgado, 2009; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003) and other studies that probe into the frustrations of second- and third-generation Mexican Americans who wrestle with issues related to negative stereotypes, debated language use, and preservation of culture and tradition

(Flores & Garcia, 2009; Glick, 2010; Romero, 2008; Roth, 2009; Vasquez, 2010). There is a need to examine, however, the growing population of Mexican-White children who may encounter similar issues related to identity and acceptance by either of their racial background groups due to language and cultural differences.

When I was forty years old, I had my first opportunity to choose multiracial as an identity factor for myself in school documents related to demographic data for the system in which I teach. Prior to 2000, I was limited to choices that identified me as either White or Hispanic, but never a combination of the two. My racial identity was even more complicated since both of my parents were certain that they had ancestors that included French, German, Irish, and Scottish bloodlines. Additionally, my parents had strong Native American ties. My maternal great-grandmother was a full blooded Cherokee Indian, and my father's mother boasted a strong Aztec Indian connection. Since I could not document my Native American heritage, my Spanish surname dictated many of my choices with respect to self-identification as an adolescent and college student. As a teenager, I opted to choose Hispanic as my predominant heritage since financial assistance for college was more readily available. My choices were ameliorated by my outward appearance and surname, which clearly indicated to the world that I was not White. I attended a women's college in the South and, since I self-identified as Hispanic, I was one of few individuals who was neither White nor privileged. As an adult, I marvel at the choices that I made as an adolescent and young adult because I chose to jest about my heritage and even ascribed racially derogatory nicknames to myself. Although I do not recall ever being ashamed of my heritage, my decisions to mock being Mexican revealed an inner conflict that must have existed even though I was naively unaware of

its presence. As I probed into the literature for this study and as I reflected on my personal experiences, I gained understanding into how I view myself through a multiracial lens and how society's perception of the multiracial identity continues to evolve.

Technological Introspection

As I contemplated the topic for my dissertation, an inward expedition became an imperative. My doctoral journey led me to a crossroads of pursuing an understanding of my multiracial identity and a sense of purpose in the self-discovery. Not only did I long to understand myself, my desire was to weave a narrative that will be meaningful to others and that will not only promote change, but empathy and understanding that will resonate with others (Tracy, 2010). The pieces of my life converged in this dissertation with a result of elation at merging introspection with my passion for presentation via technology in an effort to inform. Despite the fact that I am fifty-four years old, I am an extremely techno-proficient individual and my hope is that using digital spaces to bring this study to life will provide an opportunity to share my life in a format that is both meaningful and relevant. Our world is saturated with social media and locating this study online makes it accessible to an audience beyond the academy; the possibility of "going viral" increases opportunities for relevance. Throughout my graduate coursework, newer literacies have been integrated into the curriculum with video and audio text conveying meaningful messages that were affirmed by professors as valuable and the wave of the future (Cunningham, Many, Carver, Gunderson, & Mosenthal, 2000; McGrail, 2005; Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006).

Digital experiences will continue to evolve as technology continues to transform our world at an incredible pace. My love of technology and my ability to utilize its many resources make digital spaces the ideal vehicle for exploring my multiracial identity. My website located at www.burritosblackeyedpeas.com includes: (1) a copy of my study with hyperlinks to relevant research, (2) a family photo album, (3) audio and video files referenced in the study, (4) my reflective journal, and (5) a one-woman show with integrated images. I wrote the one-woman show as a memory piece to explore the encounters in which I remembered experiencing racial tension. Additionally, focusing on specific memories afforded me the opportunity to choose specific photographs as they related to the text of the play. Maintaining an online personal journal is becoming a trend for qualitative researchers who view personal transparency as a research imperative and blogs are growing in popularity as the appropriate place for sharing perspectives, biases, and reflective findings. (Chenail, 2011). My journal is different from normal blogs that allow comments from readers. For the purpose of this study, I reflected on personal experiences and analyzing those reflections without engaging in conversations with outsiders. I plan to collect data for future study by adding the comment feature to my reflective journal. At this time, this introspective personal study focused on being presentation-oriented rather than socially-interactive. An autoethnography is highly personal with a purpose to connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social (Ellis, 2004). Online spaces have invaded our culture and social interactions; I believe that providing my dissertation online will afford what can be described as a collaborative journey between the reader and the author (Powell, Jacob & Chapman, 2012). When readers of this study view photographs and videos described within the text,

they will be engaged in the experience in a meaningful way that could weave intricate connections between life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation (Jones, 2007). This study examined and described my experiences of growing up multiracial and the development of my multiracial identity over the course of over half a century. My life began in the late 1950s and span decades that include major changes in our world in both venues that I chose to explore—multiracial identity and multimedia technology.

Purpose Statement

According to existing research (Butcher, 2009; Dutro, Kazemi, & Balf, 2005; Root, 1996; and Shih & Sanchez, 2009), there are increasing numbers of multiracial children born each year. My experiences as a multiracial child in the 1960s and 1970s may be able to shed light on issues within society as our population increases with respect to those who self-identify with multiple heritages. As I delved into self-exploration, my hope was to connect racial ties to identity development in my experience as a multiracial of mixed Mexican and White races that negotiated numerous events related to racial identification prior to and after the opportunity to self-identify.

The purpose of this autoethnography was to explore what I encountered in various settings with respect to racial ascription that impacted the development of my multiracial identity. Although I possess several racial bloodlines, the emphasis of this study will be on my Mexican and White roots, since those are the races with which I most consciously and consistently identify. I investigated my perception of my multiracial identity through my reflection and recollection of encounters connected to racial identification prior to and since the socially acceptable ability to self-identity as multiracial. The term “multiracial”

as a racial category is relatively new in governmental documents with the first inclusion of a multiracial category on the U.S. Census in 2000 (Harris & Sim, 2002). Multiracial people can now choose how to identify themselves; however, the ability to self-identify may not change how others view them.

My personal experiences place me within a context of uncertainty when it comes to race because how I view myself may not be consistent with how others view me. My view of self continues to evolve as I have only begun to understand what being multiracial means to me; this study assisted me in discovering internal inconsistencies related to race and ethnicity. As previously mentioned, I am a multiracial individual who has had to define myself using race in numerous settings even though I have never felt completely Mexican or completely White (particularly Southern White), and I have struggled with the cultural implications of being identified as either. Identifying as multiracial has helped me deal with the emotional conflict that I have felt when I chose one lineage over another. I have also felt a freedom to be something other than White or Mexican when I have identified as multiracial because the label allows me the liberty to eliminate cultural ties with which I am uncomfortable. I feel as though I can be as Mexican or as White as I choose to be. The layers of meaning ascribed to the word "multiracial" continue to unfold; I hope that sharing my experiences will not only provide insight into multiracial identity development, but will highlight issues that multiracial individuals encounter when self-identification and identification by others are inconsistent.

The purpose of this autoethnography is to explore encounters in various settings in which racial ascription impacted my developing multiracial identity. My primary

sources of data include reflections in an online journal, video interviews of significant family members, and memories of social encounters shared via a one-woman show that includes related photographs. Data components are housed on a website developed for this study; the intent of the website is to provide the general public access to my study in hopes that it will promote empathy and change. Since one of my goals was to provide an online experience that impacted the senses and the emotions of its viewers, I chose to include multimedia elements to enhance the study. I wrote a one-woman show that included memories of social encounters that impacted my multiracial identity development. Within the text of the show, I included the pictures that I plan to project onto a background screen should I ever have the opportunity to produce the monologue. The show provided a framework for photographs since I wanted to include those that were significant to the study. Components included videos of interviews that I conducted with myself, my mother, my father, and my daughter. During the research process, I wrote how the study was impacting my ongoing multiracial identity development in a reflective journal; I found that my current social encounters were as significant as those from my childhood and adolescence since I view them through a researcher's lens. This study sought to answer the following research questions: How have I internalized and interpreted encounters related to racial identification and what does being multiracial mean to me?

Rationale for the Study

Growing up in the 1960s, most of my earlier memories of racial issues emanated predominantly from the war between integrating Black and White in educational settings, whether that meant on busses or in the classroom. The Civil Rights movement seemed

focused on the plight of the African American and the dominance of the White culture. Despite having solid roots in the South, I did not have direct experiences with integration since we were living all over the world at the time. When I was born in Lubbock, Texas, my father was stationed at the Air Force base nearby. My father is a Mexican man who was born in a border town in the United States, but raised in Tampico, Mexico, a city located at the foothills of the Sierra Madres and on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. His mother had crossed the border to naturalize her son as an American citizen by giving birth to him in the United States. As a teenager, he joined the military. After basic training in Texas, his first assignment was at Robins Air Force Base in Warner Robins, Georgia, where he met my mother, a White Southern girl.

When my mother talks about what she looked like as a teenager, she always refers to statements made about her by friends and family that likened her to movie stars of her era. She was compared to Susan Hayward and Rita Hayworth, red-haired women who were known for their beauty. When I look at pictures of my mother at fifteen, I am always astonished at how much older she looked. I can understand how men were drawn to her because her fair skin was almost flawless, with a slight presence of freckles that she tried to cover up with make-up. Her cascading curls were auburn and she possessed a curvaceous figure that was reminiscent of the poster girls of the fifties. My mother's siblings always describe her as sassy and flirtatious, so it is no wonder that my father was drawn to her because she represented what he must have seen in films during his teenage years in Texas; she was the all-American girl.

My father was a short, athletic man who had played baseball and soccer in the streets of Tampico, Mexico, and his hometown of Brownsville, Texas. He spent most of

his time outdoors which made his dark skin even darker and his facial features revealed his Aztec Indian background with a prominent nose and dark eyes. My father spoke only Spanish until his late teen years when he began a pursuit of a minor league baseball career. His height kept him from realizing his dreams of professional sports, yet he met the minimum requirement to enter the military. My father's commitment to the military was his way of being American and he has, since his retirement, shared that he served his country even though he views himself primarily as Mexican. There were times when he aligned with his Mexican roots and other times when he was purposefully American; he is patriotic to both of his countries. I think that my father's struggle with being a Mexican-American is much like my struggle of being multiracial. In certain settings, I think of myself as more Mexican than White and sometimes I view myself as White; my racial alignment seems to depend upon the context in which I find myself.

My father's physical appearance played a role in his pursuit of my mother. My maternal grandparents were initially opposed to my parents' marriage and my grandfather was uncertain and disconcerted by thoughts that my father might be part Black since his skin color was so dark. My mother was only fifteen when my parents met, but she was strong-willed and convinced her parents to let her marry my father whom she believed would provide for her financially. My mother has shared with me that she thought my father was a Latin lover like cinematic stars Ricardo Montalban and Caesar Romero. I imagine that she thought that he would take her out of poverty and to exotic locations since he was in the military. My father also baited his future in-laws by paying for some of their delinquent bills; my grandparents viewed his financial situation as better for their daughter than what they could provide at the time. My mother's family did not have the

luxury of valuing education because all they knew was a life of marriage, children, and sharecropping. Women were supposed to get married and my mother had found someone who would provide, even if he was different. My grandmother consented to the marriage because she had endured a tragic romance of being thwarted in young love. She believed that it was better to concede to my parents' marriage, despite any cultural or social misgivings that she may have possessed at the time.

As a child, I knew very little about the struggle of the Mexican people because my father did not talk about being Mexican until we were teenagers and we did not speak Spanish in our home. I encountered few Mexicans in the South during my upbringing and, since my father was in the military, I lived among various cultures around the globe and in the United States. I was born at an Air Force Base in Lubbock, Texas, and lived there until I was three years old. My father was then stationed at Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia, where I lived until I entered second grade. We were then stationed at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippine Islands for eighteen months. After having begun third grade in the Philippines, we moved to New York for the next eighteen months and I attended five different schools for third grade. I lived in New York and did not move again until the second month of fifth grade. I attended three schools for fifth grade, one in New York, one in Florida, and one in Valdosta, Georgia. We were in Florida because we were waiting for the renters in our Valdosta home to leave. We lived in Valdosta while my father was stationed in Thailand and I finished fifth grade in Georgia. Sixth grade, seventh grade, and two weeks of eighth grade were spent in Japan. I finished the eighth grade and began high school in South Dakota. My father retired from the military in 1974

and we returned to Valdosta, Georgia. I graduated from Valdosta High School in South Georgia in 1977.

When in the continental U.S., particularly in the South, my blissful ignorance of racial issues in my youth was disturbed by my father's sensitivity to others. As a teen, I remember my father sharing that he believed White people had a problem with his skin color and his marriage to my White mother who was as pale as he was dark. Even though I knew that my father had dark skin (a phenotype characteristic that my siblings and I inherited), I did not view skin color in a negative light. I could not relate to nor understand when my father brought up potential discrimination due to race because I never thought of myself as different. I had lived in places where everyone was different somehow. In the Philippines and Japan, many of my friends were racially mixed and it never occurred to me being multiracial was something bad or a reason for rejection. My heightened awareness of race continued during high school when peers constantly asked me about what I was; prior to high school, I do not recall focusing on race at all. Both of my parents grew up in poverty and lacking education; as a result, they firmly believed that education would be the avenue for success for their multiracial children. My four siblings and I were encouraged to do well in school for future successes, but I did not realize until later that my parents had concerns that we would have professional limitations due to our mixed races. My father, more than my mother, stressed the value of education as a stepping stone in our lives; I wonder if he was frustrated by his own lack of education. He never finished high school although he obtained his GED (Graduation Equivalent Diploma) in his forties.

With the surname of Castro, and living in the turbulent 1960s with the Cuban missile crisis, we were often misidentified as Cuban when our last name was mentioned. Fidel Castro's rise to power as the Cuban revolutionary resulted in a revolt on the small island in 1959 (the year I was born). Castro's subsequent anti-American posture and policies made his name infamous. Not only did total strangers want to know if we had connections to the militant dictator, teachers, doctors, and newly-formed acquaintances would quickly label us as Cubans due to our familiar surname. My father was always quick to say that we were Mexicans; his ethnic pride was very important to him and most of the Hispanics that I have encountered in my lifetime strongly align themselves to their specific nationality. When my father was stationed overseas for extended time leaving four brown children with their fair skinned mother, I remember people verbalizing that we must be adopted because we did not look like we belonged to our mother due to the conflict of skin color, a phenotype characteristic that would dominate racial identification in my life for many years.

Our identities were constantly in question, even with our Mexican family despite the surname tie because we did not speak Spanish. We did not relate well to either sets of extended family because we were not around either group consistently. I can only recall four or five visits to Texas and Mexico where our Mexican relatives spoke only Spanish around us and seemed to make fun of us continuously. They found it amusing that we did not speak their language, cook their food, or work in a place of business since childhood. Their ridicule made us think that they viewed us as spoiled White children and a disgrace to our father because we had not embraced his culture or language. My father would tell us what our Mexican family members would say; he was not one to protect us from the

taunting and teasing that included unkind Spanish nicknames and rejection. As a language teacher who has studied culture, I now understand that teasing and seemingly unkind nicknames are endearing interactions between Hispanic family members; they were probably trying to relate to us on their level, but all I felt as a child was rejection. I had few encounters with my Mexican relatives and most of my memories are tainted with nicknames, ridicule, and isolation due to language and emotional barriers.

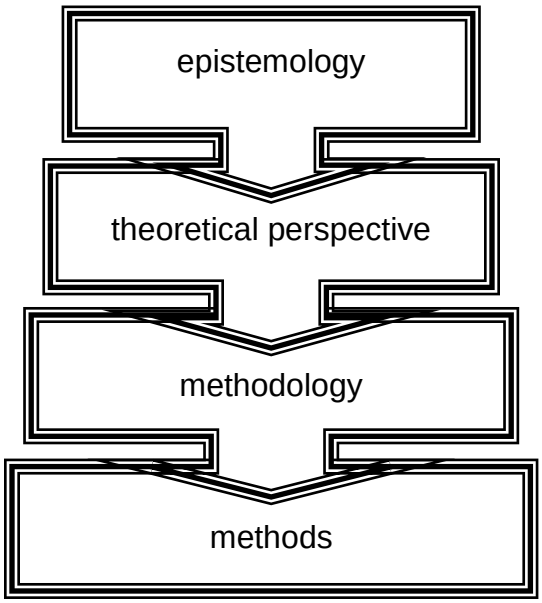
With my White relatives, I encountered a different kind of mockery that was based upon my inability to perform adult tasks. As a child, I did not know how to make homemade biscuits and placement at the grown-up table on holidays was given to my cousins who knew how to provide the "fixins'". My mother bragged about our academic accomplishments when our inability to do household chores was highlighted. I think that our White Southern relatives might have perceived us as "uppity". Even though I believe that my mother's motives were pure and that she was proud of us, she unknowingly participated in conversations that made us look like we thought were better than her family due to our aspirations that she highlighted. My siblings and I have often discussed how uncomfortable we were in extended family settings, but visits and contact were rare due to the cost of communication and travel in the sixties.

Identity issues continue to exist for me as I encounter situations in which I must identify with respect to race. As I have progressed to adulthood, I continue to battle struggles both internally and externally related to race selection and identification issues. As previously mentioned, I have been asked to racially identify for my job and my outward appearance still beckons the question: "What are you?" There have been individuals who ask me if I have Asian ancestry while others try to guess my racial

profile. My daughter looks like my White mother and White husband; my son looks like me. My daughter has encountered similar situations to mine in that others have questioned her Hispanic connection and my maternal relationship to her. Outward appearances do not corroborate precious and valued family ties. Probing into my own personal self-identification encounters provided insight into my own multiracial experience and could potentially open the eyes of individuals who prefer more clearly defined categories without understanding the implications of asking individuals to choose one lineage over another. As I plunged deeper into self-analysis as it relates to racial issues within this study, I am embarrassed to admit that ignoring systemic issues such as racism and social hierarchies based on skin tone does not align with my desire to understand multiracial identity issues. As mentioned earlier, I believed in a "color-blind" approach to the world and a Puritan work ethic that would evaluate people on what they do and who they are rather than factors such as skin color and race. I have also mentioned my naiveté that did not associate any possibility of acceptance or rejection based upon my racial background. As I read through studies on Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Theory, I now recognize that my vehement opposition to racism did not negate its presence in the world. Not only is it unrealistic to view a world void of racism, it is unfair to "people of color" to be color-blind. I have recently realized that, in a way, I was blind to color and its impact on identity formation and cultural heritage in positive ways. Much to my chagrin, studies reinforced that my particular views of colorblindness and meritocracy actually disadvantage people of color and promote racism, the very thing that I abhor and of which I believed myself to be free (Bernal, 2002; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; D'Avila & de Bradley, 2010; Gallagher, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

My greatest struggle related to this study was situating it within existing theoretical frameworks. Volumes of literature and research related to qualitative inquiry fill library shelves and academic journals. Likewise, various research methods exist and, as I have sought a framework and design for this study, my journey led me to the work of Michael Crotty. Crotty's (2003) research framework melds the purposes of research to the research processes; he outlined four elements: (1) epistemology (what knowledge informs study), (2) theoretical perspective (what knowledge can be attained from study), (3) methodology (the strategy to obtain knowledge), and (4) methods (the procedures to gather and analyze data in pursuit of knowledge). The elements inform one another and are diagramed by Crotty (2003) as followed (p.4):



As I sought to make meaning of my multiracial experience, I aligned myself with the epistemology of constructionism which asserts that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 2003, p. 43). Social constructionism situates research within cultural contexts and human interaction;

this study resides within social constructionism since, according to Crotty (2003), the word "social" adds a context that seeks meaning and understanding about human interactions. The social encounters that are shared within this study represent numerous interactions with the world. As I reflected on specific social interactions in my life, I attempted to interpret them in order to understand emerging multiracial identity. My multiracial identity development is a result of engaging in social interactions with family, friends, and strangers. My pursuit of knowledge that emerges from attempting to understand social interactions and relationships in my life neatly aligns with an epistemological stance of social constructionism.

From an epistemology of social constructionism, the theoretical framework for this study resides within LatCrit Theory developed within the field of law as an extension of Critical Race Theory. Both theories challenged laws and policies that subordinate people based upon race and/or ethnic and gender alignments. Both CRT and LatCrit theories seek to understand how people view race in an effort to challenge thinking that does not promote a just society. LatCrit Theory evolved from CRT and is considered to be like "a close cousin—related to [CRT] in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof" (Valdes, 1996, pp. 26-27). LatCrit Theory is akin to CRT; however, its focus is the Latino culture. The added dimensions of LatCrit Theory include, but are not limited to issues related to immigration, culture, identity, physical characteristics, and language (Aoki & Johnson, 2009; Bernal, 2002; Fernandez, 2002; Quiñones et al, 2011). Issues that Latinos encounter, which are not paralleled in other minority racial groups, were important to this study. Within this study, LatCrit Theory not only forced me to evaluate my views related to colorblindness and meritocracy, it

served as theoretical framework that provided structure for analyzing situations in which I felt disadvantaged or marginalized as a result of being part Mexican and part White. Since phenotype characteristics have aligned me with the Latino culture, it is important to evaluate data through lenses of LatCrit Theory to understand social situations in which my identity was influenced by those who viewed me as Latina or specific situations in which I viewed myself as such. Additionally, I need to consider the impact of Whiteness on my multicultural identity development since there are those who have always viewed me as White despite the color of my skin, including my mother. Framing my study within LatCrit Theory and evaluating the impact of Whiteness studies when applicable, I chose to use autoethnography to explore my multiracial identity. LatCrit Theory emerged in the 1990s out of Critical Race Theory (CRT); CRT appeared as a way to examine the inequalities that exist where race, law, and power intersect (Treviño, Harris & Wallace, 2008). Both LatCrit and CRT evolved beyond their beginnings in the legal sphere to extend into scholarly research in other fields, such as education and sociology. LatCrit focuses on aspects specific to the Latino experience such as language, immigration, ethnicity, and culture (Bernal, 2002). In an effort to understand my multiracial identity, this study used LatCrit Theory and Whiteness Studies as the lenses through which to look at various interactions in my life that were connected to the development of my multiracial identity.

LatCrit Theory

LatCrit Theory is essential in order to gain perspective for this study since my principal goal is to understand my multiracial identity which includes Latino roots. As an individual with mixed races of White and Mexican, I have inherited phenotype features

that have more closely tied me to my Hispanic/Mexican father. Being Hispanic carries a different weight of prejudice and discrimination than being from another non-White race because of the issues related to community and communication. One of the most effective metaphors applied to being Hispanic deals with border crossings; to cross borders to societal acceptance, one must speak the acceptable language, have the acceptable status, and be the acceptable color. For some Hispanics, color is not an issue due to European ancestry and ties; however, for those with dark complexion, alienation can result from color issues. LatCrit Theory played a significant role in contributing to this study since understanding issues related to being Hispanic are integral in identity development for me. LatCrit Theory focuses primarily on critical race issues related to being Hispanic; it was a theory forged in the legal world to attend to the needs of those oppressed by the predominately White system based upon race, language, and citizenship status (Aoki & Johnson, 2009; Bernal, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Quiñones et al, 2011).

In 1995, a group of law professors met at the annual Hispanic National Bar Association meeting held in Puerto Rico to discuss the subordination of Latinas/os in legal situations in the United States. These legal scholars discussed the effectiveness of CRT within contexts of political and cultural struggles that exist outside of the black/white paradigm, particularly the Latina/o plight in the legal system due to connections between law and racial justice. They identified the problem of the inability of CRT to attend to the needs of the Latina/o population and proposed a solution for improving the social and legal conditions of the variegated Latina/o community. At their first meeting, they established functions and guideposts for what they decided to call LatCrit Theory with a hope to transform how race is viewed since our multiracial

American society reveals issues cannot be viewed as simply black or white. Even the name LatCrit Theory was given special consideration since the term "Lat" reflects a commitment to examine legal issues connected to Latinas/os. Latino was determined as the appropriate label since the term Hispanic connotes subordination and proposes that all Latinos descended from Spain (aka Hispania) rather than recognize Latinos as a transnational and intensely diverse group (Quiñones et al, 2011). The term "Crit" reveals a commitment to promote social change. The group decided that LatCrit Theory should be practical, co-exist with Critical Race Theory and have four basic functions. According to Frank Valdes (1997), law professor and principal founder of LatCrit Theory, the four functions of the theory are as follows: (1) production of knowledge, (2) advancement of social transformation, (3) expansion and connection of anti-subordination struggles, and (4) cultivation of community and coalition, both within and beyond the confines of legal academia in the United States.

Participants in the initial LatCrit conference outlined these four essential functions based upon seven guideposts that included: (1) recognizing and accepting the political nature of legal scholarship despite claims or denials to the contrary, (2) conceiving themselves as activist scholars committed to praxis to maximize the social relevance of LatCrit theorizing, (3) building intra-Latina/o communities and inter-groups coalitions to promote social justice struggles, (4) embracing commonalities while respecting differences to chart the design of social transformation, (5) learning from outsider jurisprudence to orient and develop LatCrit Theory and praxis in all settings and efforts, (6) ensuring a continual engagement of self-critique to stay principled and grounded, and (7) balancing specificity and generality in LatCrit analysis to ensure contextualized multi-

dimensionality as the standard in LatCrit discourse (Valdes, 1996; Valdes, 1997). Additionally, theory originators established a board comprised primarily of LatCrit Theory originators, law professors, and interested scholars to spearhead meetings and publications related to LatCrit Theory. LatCrit conferences were originally held annually, but in 2010 the LatCrit board decided to organize the conference on a biennial basis.

LatCrit Theory is an evolving theory. Yosso and Solórzano (2005) outlined five tenets of CRT that impact society: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches (p.122). What makes LatCrit different than CRT is its focus on issues specific to the Latino/a population, such as language, immigration, culture, ethnicity, identity, phenotype, accent, and surname impact its community and, by extension, society as a whole (Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tate, 1997; Valdes, 1997; Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005).

Since LatCrit is an emerging theory based firmly on CRT roots, its tenets align with those of Critical Race Theory with respect to:

(1) the intercentricity of race and racism. According to Villalpando (2004), race and racism are American social constructs that impact Latinos and other marginalized groups with varying degrees of oppression and subordination. According to Valdes (1997), subordination of Latinos can include various forms of oppression; social alienation may stem from issues related to language, class, and immigration status. LatCrit Theory espouses that racial discrimination imposes upon individuals of Latino heritage with varying degrees of hostility, from overt aggression to verbal harassment

with racial epithets (Valdes, 2009; Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005). My experiences as a multiracial woman with Latina roots have resided more within the realm of verbal abuse resulting in identity confusion due to not knowing how to respond to derogatory comments made about Mexicans.

(2) the challenge to dominant ideology. The current wave in jurisprudence is to camouflage privilege and power with postures of color blindness and race neutrality (Lopez, 1998; Villalpando, 2004). If the predominant White population asserts that race is a non-factor and that color has no meaning, then people of color need to challenge these assertions. Latinos deal with discrimination related to meritocracy when it comes to education and success within current social structures due to the aforementioned issues of cultural capital being disregarded when language and ethnicity play a role (Yosso, 2005). As I shared earlier, I ascribed to a color blind mentality until I became aware that I was erasing part of my identity and denying others their identities.

(3) the commitment to social justice. LatCrit Theory emerged within jurisprudence and serves as a framework to eliminate all forms of subordination based upon race as well as strives for equality (Valdes, 1997). At recent LatCrit symposiums, participants have grown concerned that LatCrit Theory has extended itself into so many other realms of outsider jurisprudence that its focus on the Latino community is waning and must be redirected to impact the population for which it was formed (Valdes, 2009). My hope for this autoethnographic study is that it will enlighten readers to the social justice issues that impact multiracial individuals with Latino heritage, particularly Mexican roots. Anti-Mexican legislation and sentiments add to the current climate that

begs for social justice; it is highlighted in this study since social interactions that include disregard and disrespect for my Mexican heritage are discussed.

(4) the centrality of experiential knowledge. LatCrit Theory encourages the production of knowledge within the academic community (Valdes, 1997); however, a basic tenet of the theory is recognition of the valuable resource that resides within personal experience. The cultural background of an individual is an essential ingredient of identity and American culture often negates the value of culture and race if it conflicts with the dominant White culture. Language, immigration status, ethnicity, and class can be rich fodder for empowerment and knowledge; however, they are often viewed as disadvantages and deficiencies (Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005). My story includes narratives that share family histories and chronicle the development of my multiracial identity. This particular tenet will be underscored in this study since its focus is to share and analyze personal experiences in order to gain understanding.

(5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches. Whether it is the current climate of legislation related to immigration status and phenotype descriptors or the development of English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in school systems, the Latino community has been impacted by historical context. CRT analyzes race through historical and social contexts; a walk through history can provide a vista into how Latinos are viewed based upon their place in society. The Latino social experience varies from national origin to employment status; a migrant worker from Mexico is viewed differently than a physician emigrating from communist Cuba (Lopez, 1998). Economy, class status, and origin influence identity and social standing. As a daughter of a Mexican whose mother crossed the Rio Grande, my identity experiences have been froth with low

social status and defamation of my Mexican roots. Current issues continue to impact my identity even though I am only half Mexican since my outward appearance does not connect me to my White ancestry. This study explored the historical contexts that have impacted my multiracial identity development, including the addition of the multiracial category on public documents in 2000.

Whiteness Studies

While evaluating the evolution of my multiracial identity, it became clear that looking at what it means to be White was as much an imperative as evaluating my Latino/a heritage. Whiteness connotes privilege and the norm to which all other races should aspire yet some races may be able to assimilate more readily due to pigmentation (Jay, 2005). Although some studies assert that being White implies an absence of culture that only ethnic people employ (Perry, 2001), other studies affirm the privilege and power of Whiteness (Jay, 2005; Yeung, Spanierman & Landrum-Brown, 2013). I have always felt that my White ancestry was rich in Southern traditions and cultures not void of culture. The struggle that I encounter is that my White roots are strongly connected to a White supremacist position that included relatives named after Confederate officers; my grandfather's name was Stonewall Jackson Horton. The White tradition in me rejects the Mexican in me even though my experiences within my White family did not contain negative contexts. I have never considered myself privileged for being White or having White ancestry, perhaps because the White blood that flowed through my veins was sharecropper poor; I wonder if I would feel differently if I could pass for White. Despite the historical contradictions of my upbringing, my internal conflicts reside more within situations that I have encountered as an adult rather than as a child. I had not met many

Mexicans in my life nor had I collided with anti-Mexican sentiment until I became an adult. Current immigration issues and the tendency to name all illegal immigrants Mexicans create a tension for me when I am faced with thoughtless and, at times, hostile comments. Although I know that I am just as much White as I am Mexican, barbed comments stick to my brown skin and black hair.

Naming

One of the reasons I feel conflicted about my multiracial identity exists because of societal compulsions related to naming. Demographics within schools and politics force individuals to identify themselves according to race (Boris, 2005). Categorizing and sorting individuals serves a purpose and children learn early that naming "promotes attention to social category membership and influences reasoning about others" (Waxman, 2010, p. 608) When one does not fit categorically, the need to self-identify exists because of delineations within the multiracial category (Nishime, 2012). The overarching descriptor of multiracial cannot possibly meet political and educational objectives of sorting and categorizing due to the mathematical possibilities of what it could include. Presenting subcategories within the label continue to complicate self-identification as well as create political tensions due to weakening the strength of the larger racial contexts (Nishime, 2012). A multiracial individual must align with a particular ethnic heritage so that categories and names provide meaning and understanding to groups learning from demographic studies; having to name oneself creates internal tensions and conflicts since aligning with a particular group may leave out a significant loved one (Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006).

Significance of the Study

Multiracial theories continue to develop as self-identification becomes more commonplace for multiracial individuals; this study will contribute to emerging multiracial theories since the experience of individuals of mixed Mexican and White bloodlines is only beginning to be explored. The multiracial experience is as limitless as the mixture of potential bloodlines; each is unique, but there is a commonality to the experience of identity development to which this study can contribute. Popular culture reflects the growing dynamic of change when it comes to presentation of race as an issue of negative distinction. One of Michael Jackson's music videos presented a collage of faces from various races that melted into one another and a declaration of "it doesn't matter if you're black or white" or, for that matter, brown or yellow; the video ended with the text "prejudice is ignorance" which resulted in applause from the general community that viewed itself as moving away from race as a negative construct (Burnett & Deivert, 1995). This study is significant because it will contribute to the multiracial identity discussion as well as add to the chorus of multiethnic individuals seeking a voice in issues related to race identification.

My desire was to understand the development of my multiracial identity by recalling and evaluating various encounters that included situations related to racial identification. Additionally, I hope to bring about understanding related to multiracial identification issues that impact individuals of mixed-races. Although the experiences within my family are situated within the time period in which I was raised and the locations in which I grew up, the human experiences and inner turmoil as it relates to racial identification for multiracials may resonate with others and provide a catalyst for

discussion and discovery. My hope is that the insight gained by looking into my own multiracial experience will provide those who read my study an understanding of the multiracial individual. This critical autoethnography explored my evolving multiracial identity within various settings, as a child growing up during the Civil Rights Era and as an adult within the current climate of anti-Hispanic sentiments, particularly as they relate to Mexicans and Mexican immigrants. Historical events, both past and present, also played a role in interpretation and evaluation in this study. This critical autoethnography is grounded in LatCrit Theory and Whiteness Studies. Data analysis occurred in a holistic manner that considered naming, social identity construction and self-identification in order to gain understanding regarding issues related to being a multiracial individual of Mexican and White backgrounds.

Not only will this study trouble the waters of racial identification, it will contribute to a growing body of research studies found online, since I will be presenting my work, in part, on a personal webpage. I regularly search the Internet for scholarly presence, and I continue to encounter increasing numbers of research studies, including dissertations, in digital spaces. Developing portions of this study online and providing data access on a webpage appealed to me, and digital exploration creates a multimedia facet to this study that is also culturally relevant. University of Southern California professor Virginia Kuhn is leading the charge of those who are currently exploring the option of presenting entire dissertations online; she defended her web-based dissertation in 2005.There are many scholars who believe that digital dissertations are the next logical avenue for presentation due to accessibility and interactive possibilities (Kuhn, 2010). Kuhn (2010) asserted that “emergent technologies have expanded the semiotic palate,

opening up new possibilities for sophisticated academic argument across the registers of word, image, sound, and networking" (Digital Dissertations, para. 3). Readers will be able to access my journal online as well as retrieve picture and video files collected within the study. Since digital dissertations are not the current acceptable format at my university, this paper serves as the traditional hard copy with references to what exists online. Rather than using my webpage as the sole presentation format of my dissertation, it is an avenue for reflection and discovery that added insight to this study. I cannot think of a more effective venue to have a critical impact on society than the Internet, since it is the tool that society depends upon for information, opinion, and social interaction (Rolon-Dow, 2011). My life spans the decades of the most significant and transformative events in technology and advancements continue to take place at an incredible and mindboggling pace. Interpersonal communications, media presentations, and information gathering rely more and more on the Internet and technology; it continues to dramatically change how we live, interact, and present ourselves in today's world (Stefik, 1999). I hope to be part of the cultural shift in the academy and the presentation of my study online may be as significant as the findings contained therein. Additionally, an online presence will make this study more readily available to other multiracial individuals providing a greater possibility for influence and understanding.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout this study in order to gain understanding into my multiracial identity development. Terms are listed alphabetically, and connected to scholars who have either coined the terms or used them extensively:

Autoethnography. I chose to use autoethnography as the methodology for this study because I believe that there is much to be learned from the lived experience. Within autoethnography, the researcher is the subject, and the researcher's interpretation of the experience is the data (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This particular approach to research is arduous due to the layers related interpretation of and what constitutes data.

Biracial. Sometimes the sociological terms of biracial and multiracial are used interchangeable; however, biracial refers to "a person whose parents are of two different *socially* designated racial groups" (Root, 1996, p. ix). Earlier in my life, I considered myself to be biracial; I disregarded the various heritages that comprise me and focused on the two which were most significant with respect to impact on my life.

Color blindness. Prior to this study, I maintained a color blind posture with respect to race. Unbeknownst to me, I was deferring to my Whiteness since color blindness is a position that "allows many whites to define themselves as politically progressive and racially tolerant as they proclaim their adherence to a belief system that does not see or judge individuals by the 'color of their skin'" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 1).

Colorism. One of the physical characteristics highlighted within this study is skin color. As a person of color, I have been directly impacted by the impact of and lack of pigmentation. Colorism deals with privileging or discriminating against an individual based upon the lightness or darkness of skin **(**Burton, Bonita-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010)

Complimentary Othering. According to Vasquez (2010), "complimentary othering" occurs when individuals are complimented for not being like others with their heritage, ascribing a sense of superiority that they possess because they are not like the stereotypically negative aspects normally attributed to their race. During many social encounters in my life, others have either been surprised that I am Mexican or noted that I don't "act" Mexican; their tone implied that they considered their comments to be a compliment.

Ethnicity. Ethnicity focuses on the commonalities that come from language and culture (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Prior to this study, the lines between race and ethnicity were confusing terms to me because of how they are presented within demographic surveys. Recently, I completed an ethnic profile that solely focused on being Hispanic or non-Hispanic; I grimaced and wondered how individuals who were proud of their ethnic heritage felt about it not meriting consideration.

Hispanic. Vocabulary related to race and ethnicity evolves with society. I think of the many terms that my father has called himself, from Chicano to Hispanic to Latino to Mexican-American. Each title infers political undertones; according to the Hispanic Bar Association (Quiñones et al, 2011), the label Hispanic connotes subordination and proposes that all who call themselves Hispanic are descendants from Spain (aka Hispania). What I have discovered, as a Spanish teacher, most Hispanics prefer to label themselves based upon nationalism; they are Cuban or Mexican or Puerto Rican. The label connects them to their homeland and that provides identity.

Latino. The term Latino is the current trend within society and politics; as previously mentioned, the Hispanic Bar Association choose to identify their members as Latino and chose the term as part of the prefix for the theory that is one of the lenses for this study – LatCrit Theory. Within the term "Latino", there is recognition of membership in a transnational and intensely diverse group (Quiñones et al, 2011). There is room for the nationalism that is extremely important to Latinos.

Multiracial. According to Maria P. P. Root (1996), multiracial individuals are those "who are of two or more racial heritages. Thus it also includes biracial people" (p. xi). Since I can trace more than six distinct heritages, I am multiracial; since I focus on two predominant heritages, I am biracial. Multiracial includes biracial; therefore, I am multiracial. The term multiracial as a demographic term has been greatly debated since it dismantles racial constructs that have served to delineate and divide. Additionally, being able to self-identify as a multiracial is a recent phenomenon with impact that has yet to be uncovered and understood.

Phenotype. Phenotype is the observable characteristics of genetic attributes such as skin, hair, and eye color. Outward appearance plays an important role in this study due to the exploration of socially ascribed constructs of being multiracial as it relates to an individual of the White race, regardless of ethnic background, with a race that has darker skin tones. According to Stokes-Brown (2012), phenotype is one of the ways in which Latinos self-identity and view the world; it is significant to this study since many multiracial individuals, like me, carry the physical attributes that link them to one parent and perhaps not the other.

Race. Race and ethnicity are not identical terms; race relates to phenotype similarities and/or sensed prejudice (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Racial identity has been historically understood as a response to racism and prejudice; issues with Latinos nowadays are froth with racism. There is increasing prejudice that has been felt in my own life due to my Mexican heritage. Race and racial issues are central to the discussions within this study since multiracial identity cannot be understood without context within race as a social construct.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

As a child, my upbringing was somewhat like the *I Love Lucy* show with its cultural misunderstandings and miscommunications. My father's Hispanic heritage included machismo and male dominance while my maternal background included bigotry, poverty, and a leaning toward what many call being redneck; it was a culture clash that prevented me from neatly fitting into a box of a girl that grew up on tacos and salsa dancing as many believed. The first time I realized that I had to think about my racial background was in high school when peers asked me "what I was" and when I had to self-identify on standardized testing with respect to race. Demographic choices in the late 1970s were limited to White, Black, and Chinese. I glanced at my tanned hand holding the number two pencil used to bubble in a choice. Clearly, I was not White nor was I Black. I was not Chinese even though my almond shaped eyes made my peers believe otherwise. In retrospect, I wondered if a teacher would have scolded me and not allowed me to choose White as my ethnic origin if I had done so. I often wonder what would have happened to me if I had stubbornly identified myself as a White girl on standardized tests. Although self-identification in high school was an integral part of my multiracial identity development, other social identity issues came into play as I was growing up in the 1960s on military bases around the world. Since I attended numerous schools across the globe as a child, my family was the only consistent environment of my childhood. My social identity was honed primarily in the home and under the authority of two parents from very different racial and cultural heritages. In this section, I present a literature review that outlines the issues associated with the development of social identity as it relates to multiracial identity.

Social Identity Development

The quest for identity begins at birth and continues through adulthood as humans attempt not only to find their place in the world, but how to relate to others within their sphere of influence. Since social interactions with others are part of developing identity (Mead, 1934), it is important to consider the factors that ameliorate or impede symbolic interactions such as race, family dynamics, social status, and economic factors. Many times social status and economic factors are linked with racial background; however, for the multiracial child, family dynamics can also be fraught with racial issues due to hampered identity development based upon uncertain connections with family members. Many times I have encountered people who would deny my relationship to my mother based upon the absence of similar physical appearances; the denial of my mother's connection played a role in my identity development. Not only does social identity development help an individual to define others, it enables a person to classify self in relationship to others in essence to find one's place in the world (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). There are others who contend that ethnicity and race serve to delineate and identify based upon racial lines which are social constructions with political agendas (Bernstein, 2005), substantiating the elements of oppression and power within the context of critical race theory.

Not only do multiracial individuals encounter social identity development issues, psychological stress occurs while forming a social identity since, as Bernstein stated, "simply belonging to multiple racial groups does not guarantee that multiracial individuals will psychologically identify with all of those groups" (2005, p. 36). The multiracial experience is as variegated as the potential bloodlines that create the

individual, creating a conundrum for researchers who attempt to develop identity theory and understand the increasing phenomenon. Adding to the confusion for individuals of Hispanic origin is the presence of skin color variations, ranging from black to white with shades of brown in between. Additionally, individuals from Latin American boast national pride based upon European ancestry or Native American or indigenous bloodlines. My siblings and I were told that we could and should boast about our Aztec heritage as well as our German roots. My paternal grandfather had blue eyes and was sure that they came from his Germanic ancestry while my father's mother stood only four feet nine inches with distinctive American Indian facial features. A *mestizo* is an individual of mixed European and Indian ancestry; we were *mestizos.* My mother's parents were equally proud of their English and Irish ancestry, but my mother's maternal grandfather was full-blooded Cherokee Indian. Understandably, I often described myself as "racially confused" or likened myself to Heinz 57 sauce since I possessed so many racial ingredients. My siblings and I did not identify ourselves with the various groups that were assigned to us by our ancestors; we used culture as our relational guide. In Brown, Hitlin, and Elder's (2006) exploration on self-identification by multiracials, they discovered that "for individuals living in a multiracial, multiethnic society like the United States, meaningful groupings are identified by self and others on the basis of the symbolic material that channels and sustains broadly recognized social categories" (p. 414). My social identity developed as Mexican and Southern White, cultural labels that were understood within the broader context of my relationships with family members, particularly my parents. Within our society, a struggle exists because the multiracial "dynamic is rendered complex because legitimate identity does in fact exceed the bounds

of its racial context" (Hall, 2001, p. 121). This study will attempt to unpack some of the complexities of the multiracial experience in order to inform society about limits that should no longer exist due to racial delineations since racial lines continue to blur at an exponential rate and will be increasingly more difficult to use for informative demographic purposes.

Multiracial Identity Issues

In order to lead a discussion that includes biracial issues, an awareness of the growing theories related to biracial identity development must exist. Kerry Ann Rockquemore (1999) developed a biracial theory guided by symbolic interactionism developed within her qualitative study that involved interviews of fourteen biracial students at a Midwest Catholic University. She concludes that "being biracial can be interpreted in four ways: (1) a border identity, (2) a protean identity, (3) a transcendent identity, or (4) a traditional identity" (Rockquemore, 1999, p. 200). According to Rockquemore, racial interpretation can be understood by defining the identity terms that she developed: (1) Biracial individuals can perceive themselves as possessing a *border* identity, or lying between the heritages of their parents. (2) Rockquemore contended that crossing boundaries between ethnicities when socially appropriate defines those who possess a *protean* identity. (3) Thirdly, discarding relationship to either background thereby negating the impact of racial identification as a factor in identity development indicates a *transcendent* identity. (4) Finally, a biracial person who chooses the *traditional* identity is one who ascribes to existing racial categories of ethnicity. Rockquemore's interviews resulted in the aforementioned categories; however, she contended that confusions and struggles remain because physical appearance continues to

prompt questions about ethnicity that multiracial individuals may or may not be willing to answer. The willingness to deal with physical aspects of racism prompts a discussion about the role that race places in multiracial identification and whether or not marginalization occurs.

Rockquemore proposed a set of categories for multiracial identity labeling; however, there are numerous multiracial identity conversations within the research world. From the psychological impact of self-identification to the sociological implication of belonging within one's own extended family, the multiracial identity issue will continue to be fodder for research in the future since the multiracial population continues to grow exponentially (Binning et al, 2009; Brackett, Marcus, McKenzie, Mullins, Tang & Allen, 2006; Cheng & Lee, 2009; Miville et al, 2005). Whether one's racial identity comes from heredity or acquired through social interactions, investigating the multiracial identity will become increasingly important as our world continues to converge and diverge over areas of race. This study will contribute to conversations related to multiracial identity development prior to and since the year 2000 when multiracial individuals were able to self-identify as possessing more than one racial heritage.

The multiracial demographic category within public documentation is a recent addition to the ethnic identification section. Up until the year 2000, multiracial individuals were previously asked to identify themselves within distinct racial categories that did not appropriately define them on the U.S. Census (Binning et al., 2009); the decision to add the multiracial category met with controversy and debate since adding the category would create problematic applications of the Civil Rights Act (Allen & Turner, 2001). Additionally, changes to standardized testing documents made the multiracial

identification issue a potential conflict within educational contexts. Within the study described by Binning et al (2009), identification issues related to educational settings played a role in identity development and it appears that there is potential emotional, psychological, and educational damage that can be done by uninformed educators and school personnel. When significant adults misidentify or allow misidentification, confusion and socialization issues may result. Previously existing racial categories confined the students within this study who entered classrooms with homespun diversity. The multiracial children of this study were impacted by the inability to racially define themselves. Additionally, educators sorted them into previously ascribed categories with the attached low expectations for students of Mexican origin disregarding their White heritage due to physical traits and a surname that made them Hispanic.

When a multiracial individual navigates the waters of ancestry, there are conscious choices that are made in order to fit in with the dominant group that rely upon confidence in one's own identity or a conscious choice to make light of the situation to avoid conflict. In an investigative study to introduce a new theoretical construct known as social identity complexity, Roccas and Brewer (2002) asserted that individuals with multiple social identities managed their social situations using one of the following four strategies: (a) "intersection" or identification with the intersection of multiple social groups (e.g., someone who is both Mexican and White will only identify with others who are also Mexican and White), (b) "dominance" or identification with a singular primary social group (someone who is both White and Mexican will only identify with being Mexican), (c) "compartmentalization" or identification with either social group based upon social context (someone who is both Mexican and White will identify with being

Mexican in one setting, and being White in another setting), and (d) "merger" or identification with both social groups (someone who is both Mexican and White will identify with both Mexican and White racial groups). As an adolescent, I recall making choices that poked fun at my Mexican heritage in order to be accepted in the White social sphere. I bristle at the memory of choosing a racially derogatory term as my nickname for a class t-shirt and I still marvel that my social studies teacher allowed me to wear "SPIC" in big letters across my back. I cannot imagine an African-American teen or one of mixed Black and White blood wearing clothing with "nigger" prominently emblazoned. Additionally, I threw myself wholeheartedly into Mexican cultural experiences and shared them in my Spanish classes in order to align myself with my Hispanic roots.

In looking at Roccas' and Brewer's (2002) study, I recall that most of my choices were to explain myself to the predominantly White groups in which I found myself. I did not know any Mexican children other than my cousins who I saw every other year, if that often. My childhood was global and my experiences were slightly different than those that the authors delineated in that my siblings were the only children that I knew who were specifically of mixed Mexican and White heritage. I did find myself, however, relating easily to fellow military children that were racially mixed. My awareness of racial mixing was awakened during our time in Japan. Many of my school friends were half Japanese and half White or half Japanese and half Black. This was the first time in my life that I recalled other children whose parentage was of interest to peers even though I still did not totally relate to them because their almond shape eyes connected them to their mothers and there were few who believed that the red-haired woman with fair skin who accompanied me to Girl Scouts was my mother. There was still an

emotional connection of being different somehow and my mother tried desperately to make us believe that we were more interesting and special because we had more ingredients. Her simple explanations about our differences always comforted me somehow and kept me from focusing on heritage for most of my childhood. My alignment with my Mexican heritage included what I perceived as positive and acceptable aspects that I could use to gain acceptance. My mother always graciously prepared Mexican feasts for my classes when we studied the country or the language. I shared earlier that my upbringing resembled that of the *I Love Lucy* show and I consistently mimicked my parents' accents to entertain my friends. Laughter was the primary vehicle for me in gaining acceptance; I shared the antics and verbal *faux pas* that occurred in my home on a daily basis to entertain others. I chose to believe that the laughter that ensued came from delight and not mockery.

Each possible combination of multiracial identities carries sociological and psychological implications that must be investigated such as identity issues that arise due to validation or invalidation of racial self-identification. In Kerry Ann Rockquemore's (2003) collaboration with family therapist Tracey A. Laszloffy, the researchers followed a qualitative research design that included narrative to learn about sociological implications and needs for biracial identity theory as well as uncover findings that will benefit multiracial clients in counseling. The researchers surmised that "If we are to grow and develop in healthy ways, we must receive some validation from others. With respect to racial identity, we posit that the amount of validation and invalidation one receives relative to his or her identity choice is more important than the particular racial identity that he or she chooses" (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003, p. 120). Rockquemore and

Laszloffy (2003) describe a particular case study of a 14 year old biracial girl named Cory whose White mother had brought her to therapy due to concern about depression issues. After escorting Cory through narrative therapy approach, the therapist discovered that her struggles came from her views of self as well as messages from her social context. Cory's depression issues were tied to her inability to be who she felt that she was. Additionally, Cory struggled with family context since her mother allowed anger against her father to spill into anti-Black sentiments that alienated her. Additionally, Cory was confused by her relationship with her African-American grandmother who projected anti-White sentiments. Cory's struggle with accepting self (or any part of herself) is understandable as significant people in her life sent antagonistic messages negating building blocks for a healthy identity. As the therapists led Cory, her mother, and her grandmother through narrative therapy, all the parties involved gain understanding and sought to ameliorate the situation via purposeful positive messages. Neither Cory's mother nor her grandmother was aware that they had played a role in the girl's struggle. Awareness was the key to providing a healthy support system which would help Cory handle future anti-identity encounters.

Recent investigations further unpack the concept of multiracial identity and the attached developing theories that contend with one another. In Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado's (2009) synopsis of multiracial identity development theories, the authors investigated the correlations between research and theory, tested existing multiracial identity theories, and shared propositions related to racial identity theory development for the multiracial population. Within this review of literature and theory, the authors summarized existing multiracial theories but limited their evaluation to studies of people

of black and white mixed-race heritage. After reviewing literature across multiple disciplines, four identity development patterns rose related to multiracial identity development: (1) racial identity varies, (2) racial identity often changes over the course of one's life, (3) racial identity development does not follow a predictable linear process with a single outcome, and (4) social, cultural, and spatial context are critical (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). The authors asserted that the struggles that exist within theories and scholarly discussions related to multiracial theory are similar to those that multiracial individuals internalize; there is an absence of consensus and no clear definition because the existence of mixed-race people and the possibilities of merging bloodlines and cultures make it difficult to have a "one size fits all" theory or approach. The authors concluded that the construct of race as it currently exists no longer meets the needs of the population that completes the newly restructured census and theory must be realigned to reflect new political and social structures.

In Jennifer Vasquez's (2010) qualitative study on the racialization process of third generation Mexican Americans, both monoracial and multiracial, found that individuals found themselves on a continuum that ranged from a flexible ethnic position that involved varying interpretations in school and social settings to those of being racial discriminated against due to negative stereotyping as nonwhite. The researcher conducted extensive interviews with 29 third-generation Mexican Americans in two California cities, one in a larger metropolitan area in North California and the other in a Southern urban area. Within the study, seven individuals were multiracial and all participants were measured as middle class; those who were not students held white-collar jobs. Conducted in English, the semi-structured interviews consisted of asking participants to complete a

form with biographical data and to engage in inquiry related to experiences that included their Mexican American family background. Questions included three areas of which participants reflected on their racial background: (1) experiences within institutions such as school, church, work, government agencies, and family; (2) experiences in social settings; and (3) subjective experiences that promote social or psychological understanding. Vasquez (2010) stated that her qualitative research design was aimed at accessing "depth and nuance regarding respondents' perspectives on how their race and gender intersect in their everyday lives" (p. 51). Participants detailed experiences where marginalization and prejudice stemmed from physical appearance and the researcher concluded that working towards an identity that does not fit within preconceived ideas requires intensive emotional and mental effort. Vasquez also concluded that stereotypes extend to U.S.-born Mexican Americans and multiracials who are tied to their Hispanic roots via physical appearance. Vilified because of looking like vicious gang members presented by the media or mistaken for someone of Arab descent due to coloring, the participants of Vasquez's (2010) study shared the impact that physical appearance bears on identity. One young multiracial woman recounted an experience with a college counselor who refused to believe that she was half Mexican because she no longer spoke the language she had learned as a child or participated in Latino organizations, but mostly because she was light-skinned. He assured her that she would have to prove her heritage somehow because no one would believe that she was anything but White. Within the study, Vasquez (2010) also identified the concept of "complimentary othering" when individuals are complimented for not being able to be lumped together with others of their heritage, connoting a type of superiority that they possess because they are not like

the negative aspects stereotypically attributed to their race. Finally, the researcher concluded that multiracial individuals did not endure the same stereotyping that monoracials did; however, she believed that the number of multiracial participants was too small to be significant and merits further investigation, particularly as it relates to the concept of "complimentary othering" (Vasquez, 2010).

W. S. Carlos Poston's (1990) article entitled "The Biracial Identity Development Model: A Needed Addition" was penned a decade before the U.S. Census Bureau added the multiracial category as an option in 2000. Poston (1990) asserted that trying to fit multiracial individuals into existing ethnic identity models could not be done because "these models do not allow for the integration of several group identities" (p. 152). The experience of being multiracial causes both internal and external struggles for the individual. Trying to decide which ancestral heritage has more significance in one's life or choosing not to identify with any particular heritage are some of the internal battles that a multiracial person may wage. According to Poston (2001), identity models based upon a multiracial identity are complex because some models place "identity problems solely within the individual" (p. 153). While Poston proposed a new and more positive model for multiracial identity, there is still a need to understand those who have already self-identified and feel the brunt of a society that may or may not have a place for them due to the complexity of their heritage. Some of the identity issues that multiracial individuals experience are imposed upon them by monoracial individuals who may not understand or care about self-concept as it relates to being multiracial. Poston's article was written for counselors and teachers to help them understand the complexity of the multiracial experience so that they can help parents and children form a healthy

multiracial identity that emphasizes the positive aspects of ancestry while negotiating self-concept in an ever-changing society.

As multiracial individuals struggle with the process of self-identification on demographic data required for the educational process, it becomes increasingly important for school authorities to be aware of the issues that may arise. According to a recent quantitative study on self-identification, Townsend, Markus, and Bergsieker (2009) predicted that the participants in their study would "experience a wide variety of situations involving some form of identity denial" (p. 190). The researchers recruited 59 biracial students and told them that they would be filling out a life experience questionnaire; they asked students to identify a time when self-identification had caused stress in their lives. Participants described the stressful situations in answers to questions that were open-ended as well as divulged their ethnic heritage. Since one of the most significant situations in which stress surfaced for multiracials included checking only one box on a demographic report, the researchers performed a second study with 52 biracial individuals to see if stress caused by forced self-identification truly impacted performance on testing. Townsend et al. pursued the negative impact of being forced to choose; some participants received questionnaires with an option of choosing only one racial identity while others received surveys with the option of selecting all racial categories that applied. Students were given several tasks to accomplish after declaring a closed or open racial heritage. The participants answered questions related to self-esteem as well as completed a word search that included words of affirmation. The affirming vocabulary was, according to the researchers, more visible to those who had racial options prior to the task and students reported that they were relaxed while solving the

puzzle. After performing all tasks, participants were asked to reflect on what they had initially been asked to do with respect to racial identification. There was a significant difference in the self-esteem and ability to reflect positively between the individuals who were forced to choose only one identity and those who were able to report their multiracial identity. The researchers concluded that if students taking the SAT were forced to self-identify prior to taking the test, performance may be impacted by an inability to appropriately define self. Since performance can be affected through expected reporting of race, it might be more appropriate to gather "such information at the conclusion rather than start of a test [for] a more neutral or identity safe testing environment for students with diverse racial backgrounds" (Townsend et al., 2009, p. 202).

There are those who contend that educators must develop a more contemporary way of looking at race due to the growing population of multiracial individuals and "challenge the mirage of stable and static racial categories and introduce new 'literacies of race' in the classroom" (Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, 2005, p. 103). Within classrooms, there may be myriads of biracial children who remain unidentified because their outward appearances are ambiguous yet they seek identity answers as well. The 2005 qualitative research study of Dutro, Kazemi, and Balf took place over two years in a fourth then fifth grade classroom, involving 23 children. In an effort to engage children in a literacy project to share cultural backgrounds, these researchers discovered that their efforts to celebrate diversity resulted in "hurt and frustration for…three biracial students as other children questioned their claims to their own racial identities" (Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, 2005, p. 97). The experience of the biracial children in this study was like Child's (2005)

"metaphor of the 'miner's canary'—the canaries miners use to alert them to a poisonous atmosphere" (p. 6). The three multiracial children who talked with the teachers about their peers' insistence in labeling them contrary to their self-identification pointed to existing stereotypes that were negative and hurtful. Their protests helped the teachers and the researchers involved see the racial dynamics that still exist in classrooms. The documented conversations revealed identity and self-esteem issues that cannot be ignored. These researchers contended that educators must be made aware of the evolving ways of racial identification so that they can work with children as they "grapple with the complexities of race and what it means to claim membership in racial categories" (Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, 2005, p. 97). The authors asserted that the educational experience extends to teachers as they guide students in "their understanding of race [because it] requires that we as adult educators examine our own assumptions about and experiences with race and identity" (Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, 2005, p. 98). The educators in this study stated that they chose the teaching profession because of a desire to make a difference and impact the lives of children. The authors surmised that racial issues can cause situations in which teachers can have a negative impact with their students if they are not careful. According to the researchers in this study, teachers are among most significant adults in children's lives and "biracial people whose chosen racial identity is consistently invalidated by others (especially from those who are emotionally significant to the individual) are at risk of psychological distress" (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003, p. 119). Because the teachers in the Dutro et al. study took the time to allow the biracial children to process their negative feelings with their classmates, they were able to receive important validation that was essential to their identity development. If they had not done

so, “the biracial children would have left the project with no outlet for the anger, frustration, and confusion they felt when others questioned their right to their claimed racial identities” (Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, 2005, p. 106).

Multiracial theories continue to develop and researchers attempt to understand the issues dealing with marginalization of individuals of mixed heritages; additionally, some critical race theorists are amending theories to include multiracial individuals (Burton et al, 2010). Burton et al. (2010) published a review of literature produced within the decade following the inclusion of the multiracial category in an effort to understand amendments to critical race theory. Not only did the authors discuss the inaugural decade of multiracial individuals self-identifying, they also evaluated current perspectives on colorism as it pertained to families of color. Burton et al. (2010) clearly defined terms that were pertinent to understand their literature review including race as a division of individuals based upon genotype or phenotype, ethnicity as a subset of people who share characteristics such as heritage to distinguish them from other groups, and colorism as distinction based upon skin tone that provides prejudice or privilege. Since there is an abundance of literature concerning racial issues and trends, the authors decided to focus on three topics that were of particular interest to them as a group: (1) inequality and socioeconomic mobility within and across families, (2) interracial romantic pairings, and (3) the racial socialization of children. After reviewing a great deal of literature, Burton et al. (2010) concluded that colorism played a major role in the first decade of the new millennium and was a factor in wealth accumulation for families of color. Based upon the literature evaluated, the reviewers concluded that social scientists may need to rethink and restructure critical race theory in order to attach meaning to personal and public

identities of individuals and families in a society that is becoming more and more multiracial. Researchers also concluded that few studies "have explored what being biracial or multiracial means for children's life course opportunities and family experiences" (Burton et al., 2010, p. 452).

In Bettez's (2010) qualitative study on mixed-race women and identity, the researcher used Stuart Hall's premise that identity results from discourse with belonging and exclusion based upon social experiences. Bettez (2010) sought subjects for her study by distributing digital fliers with images of famous mixed-race women to an electronic mailing list from a large southeastern university; she decided to focus her study on the identity formations of six participants who responded to her email. She conducted interviews and held two focus groups with the participants. The researcher evaluated her data through the lens of belonging and diaspora. Diaspora is defined by Bettez (2010) as disruptive to the theory of belonging because race does not automatically connote kinship. One of her conclusions about mixed-race women was that they "can feel a sense of dissonance from one or both parents and extended families" (p. 154). She concluded that her work was significant in exploring a sense of belonging, as set up by Stuart Hall, and that the mixed-race women's stories she had gathered revealed significant discussions to the changing paradigms of stable racial categorizations.

Binning et al. (2009) investigated the psychological impact of self-identifying as multiracial as it related to well-being and social engagement. Binning et al.'s (2009) quantitative study included 182 multiracial high school students from two California schools who were randomly selected to participate in the study. Researchers obtained participants by visiting high school classrooms and inviting both monoracial and

multiracial students to participate in a study, with parental permission. After securing permission, they conducted a survey that included questions about home life and after-school activities and began with the opportunity to self-identify with respect to race. Later in the survey, students were asked to answer an open-ended question: "The ethnic group I most identify with is: _____." (Binning et al., 2009). After coding responses and viewing them through statistical measures, they concluded that multiracial individuals who embraced their multiracial status fared better psychologically and socially than those who aligned themselves with only one of their heritage ethnic groups, whether or not the group was considered "high" or "low" by society's standards (Binning et al., 2009). The researchers also suggested that "perhaps the ability to stand one's ground and reject social pressure to identify with a single racial group and instead adopt a multiracial identity connotes a high level of resiliency among individuals who choose to identity with multiple racial groups" (Binning et al., 2009, p. 45). Inevitably, they concluded that there is still a great deal of research that needs to be conducted with respect to the multiracial identity and the impact of being able to self-identify with respect to race.

LatCrit Theory grew out of Critical Race Theory (CRT), issues related to CRT and multiracial are essential to this study and should be considered. CRT was developed within the legal world to have a framework in which to deal with inequalities related to racial issues; however, Christopher Knaus (2009) believed that CRT should be amended in order to be inclusive of the growing population of multiracial individuals. Since the focus of current educational legislation attempts to meet the needs of all students, critical race theory and critical relevant pedagogy would have to include the increasing multiracial population to truly be effective. Within Christopher Knaus' (2009) article on

applying critical race theory to a high school writing class in order to encourage student voice and foster academic excellence, the author shared the need for teachers to silence their preconceptions and listen attentively to students of color in order to bring out the best in them. Knaus (2009) considered storytelling to be a core ingredient of CRT and believed that applying CRT in the classroom with allowing students to narrate their experiences was a method of challenging mainstream school and providing structure that affirmed them and provided relevance. According to the author, the worth of the individual must be affirmed through listening and clear expectations since critical race theory asserts that schools view people of color as less intelligent and possessing less value than their White counterparts (Knaus, 2009). Knaus' (2009) article included his process of relating to students and attributing value to them by sharing that he had left teaching college in order to invest in their education and that his expectations were reasonable. Their response to his relational approach to teaching made it clear to him that teachers who applied CRT would be more effective with students of color because they would be able to understand the oppressive and exclusive environments that their students had previously endured. Validating students' experiences and allowing them to speak passionately were encouraged in Knaus' (2009) classrooms resulting in engaged students who became confident in themselves and more receptive to the teaching and learning process. I contend that teachers need to be aware that all multiracials do not fit into one neat multiracial category since heritage plays a role in the classroom.

Christopher Knaus (2009) shared that his ethnic background enabled him to understand his students and value their deficient educational experiences that may have previously demeaned and silenced them. According to Rita Kohli (2009), critical race

theory should be an essential component of teacher preparation programs and teachers of color should be viewed as insiders who can provide insight to their White counterparts. Using a critical race theory (CRT) framework, Kohli's article explored the reflections of female educators of regarding their experiences with race and racism in schools. Qualitative interviews were conducted with twelve Asian-American, Black and Latina women enrolled in a social justice teacher preparation program in Los Angeles. Their stories exposed (1) their personal experiences with racism in school; (2) what they observed as racism that students of colors endured in schools today; and (3) racial hierarchies that exist within teacher education. Kohli (2009) found that racism continues to disturb the schooling experiences of Asian-American, Black and Latina/o students. Additionally, the author discovered that teachers of color can provide a valuable resource of personal knowledge, stories, and ideas related to educational inequality. The context of the study included a review of teacher education literature and critical race theory that provided insight into the reflections of the participants that included their schooling experiences that verified the racial hierarchies that continue to exist within teacher education. The author concluded that critical race reflections of teachers of color can be a valuable asset within teacher education programs, serving both teachers and, by extension, their school systems and students. Using CRT as a research framework, Kohli (2009) believed that critical race theory demands that research must benefit the participants and the communities from which they come; it would be a disservice to not integrate what is learned from the interviewees.

Within my qualitative study, the role of race will be significant in analyzing various interactions in my life. As stated earlier, not only do multiracial theories impact

this study because they reveal the gap that exists in investigating multiracial individuals of Hispanic lineage, but the LatCrit extension of Critical Race Theory is the principal lens through which data will be analyzed since my multiracial identity hinges on being half Mexican, Studies that outline the Hispanic experience provide insight for this study since most people have labeled me based upon my surname and outward appearance. Among the numerous studies that highlight the oppression and marginalization of the Latino population is a research study by D'Avila and Aviles de Bradley (2010). D'Avila and de Bradley (2010) published a research study of the educational system of Chicago, Illinois, as it related to serving the Latino population of the area. Looking through CRT and LatCrit theoretical lenses, the researchers analyzed four themes that highlighted the structural inequities for Latino children in the school district related (1) Early Childhood Education; (2) Standardized Assessment; (3) Overcrowding and Drop-out rates; and (4) Bilingual Education. The authors asserted that racism is widespread within our society and impacts Latinos with varying degrees of oppression based upon factors for which LatCrit Theory was developed: language and citizenship (D'Avila & de Bradley, 2010). The researchers' attempts to collect data were met with resistance by school officials who claimed that they did collect the data that the researchers requested. Working with a social worker who had worked with the Chicago Public School system as well as a public official of Latino heritage and a committee of vested parents, the researchers accumulated enough data to highlight the disenfranchised Latino population within one of the nation's largest public school systems. Their findings included absence of opportunities due to language barriers and citizenship issues. Language was highlighted as one of the major tools of oppression in this study. D'Avila and de Bradley (2010) concluded that those

who “do not possess knowledge in the dominant/preferred language (English) [are] essentially viewed as ‘less than.’ Language is viewed on a hierarchy that is based on white social norms. This hierarchy is constructed and controlled by the dominant or ruling ‘protectors’ of knowledge” (p. 49). As I reflect on the fact that my father chose not to teach us Spanish in the home, I cannot help but wonder if he had already surmised the power of the English language for our future success in a world that was full of White English speakers.

Physical Appearance and Racial Identification

Racial identification in my experience had always been based upon my surname or a quick glance at my outward appearance that revealed black hair, brown and almond-shaped eyes, and tanned skin. When I was asked “what” I was on numerous occasions, I responded that I was a half-breed or a mutt or Heinz 57 or a combination of Mexican, Indian, Irish, Scottish, French and German. On public documents, however, such as college applications and standardized tests, I had to choose my racial affiliation based upon pre-existing categories. Choosing “White” forced me to deny my father’s heritage, while choosing “other” meant I had to deny my mother’s. On these forms, I was either Mexican or White, but not both. Choosing a racial category seems an easy task unless you are multiracial and must choose or deny one of your parents. Complicating the decision are the physical aspects that play a significant role in making a decision on which racial heritage to choose. Brunsma and Rockquemore’s (2001) quantitative study involved 177 biracial individuals of Black and White heritage and focused on the phenotype qualities such as skin color and hair type that caused individuals to choose one ethnic background over another. The study proposed that appearance and racial identity

were “comprised of two components: self-perceived skin color (how biracial respondents place themselves on a skin color continuum) and socially-mediated appearance (how biracial respondents understand their own appearance based on how others interpret their appearance)” (2001, p. 230). The researchers summarized that self-perception was not as important as societal beliefs and they hypothesized that their respondents’ understandings of self were not as important as those that were “rooted more in other’s perceptions and assumptions of appearance” (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001, p. 230). The study was very detailed and included surveys that ranked skin pigmentation and discrimination experience. Although the results varied depending upon the self-identification of the individuals in the study, most participants chose to view themselves as monoracial or without racial identification or as borderline with respect to race. The researcher’s conclusion was clear, “appearance remains a significant constraining factor in identity construction and maintenance” (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001, p. 244).

Not only does appearance play a major role in identifying multiracial individuals, it can also create awkward situations for the multiracial individual that can cause frustration and identity issues. Butcher’s (2009) qualitative study examined four biracial females and their responses to the question, “What are you?”, as well as their perceptions about the question and the curiosity of the individuals posing the question. Butcher contended that some individuals were not even allowed to “have permission to declare a ‘biracial’ identity” (p. 11). The researcher presented four women who shared their frustrations about identity questions that they perceived as rude or offensive that reduced them to a “what” instead of a “who”? The four young women in this study all responded to racial identity questions depending upon what they perceived as the hidden agenda of

the question. Butcher found that they were unlikely to respond to strangers with what they perceived to be curiosity and a desire to label; the women purposefully chose a distanced posture because they did not want unfamiliar people to feel any sort of comfort level when posing questions related to ethnicity. They did, however, inform friends or other established relationships of trust of their heritages when the asked in social and familiar settings. In both cases, however, they dealt with issues when self-identification did not affirm others' perceptions of them. Although the identity question is one that is invasive, the participants had "more tolerance when they believed someone had a genuine interest in their culture for nonjudgmental purposes" (Butcher, 2009, p. 17). This study precipitated frustration in the respondents, and the study may have been different, as stated by the researchers, had they rephrased the question to "who are you."

When humans sort individuals into groups based upon outward appearance, the dividing factors will eventually develop into delineations that use skin color as a sorting measure. Up until the 20th century, the color line in the United States simply divided black and white yet the increase in other ethnic groups that may add to the spectrum of colors and those individuals may perceive themselves representing colors other than black or white. According to Lee and Bean (2007), "if the problem of the 20th century was the color line, the question of the 21st century could be one of multiple color *lines*" (p. 563). In their 2007 study of U.S. census data as well as qualitative interview data from interviews with 46 multiracial Americans, Lee and Bean explored the choice options available to multiracials as well as the layers of meaning that existed within those choices. This mixed-methods study provided a historical perspective on the divide that exists between Black and White Americans. Lee and Bean (2007) traced legislation that

placed Asians and Latinos within the group of ‘people of color’; when societal labels change, individuals may view themselves differently as a result. Although those of Asian and Latino background were initially identified as nonwhite, the winds of political climate have shifted through the years and individuals with Asian and Latino heritage are viewed more with White cultural reference than perceived as outsiders. Lee and Bean (2007) conducted a number of interviews with individuals who claimed multiracial heritage. The interviews within Lee and Bean’s (2007) study echoed historical findings in that they felt more closely akin to White than any other race. The concern expressed by Lee and Bean was that the groups that were non-Black were growing in disproportionate numbers. Those who identified themselves or were identified as Black due to phenotype qualities, even those who were multiracials, will feel even more isolated than before due to the size of the group accepted as White. The multiracial group is growing in number and bears further investigation into the ties of identity and appearance since some individuals do not seem to have society’s permission to self-identify due to obvious phenotype qualities that place them within a particular group (Bernstein & De La Cruz, 2008; Cheng & Lee, 2009; Jackson, 2009; Linehan, 2000).

There are sociological and psychological issues at stake when it comes to racial identification. France Twine’s (1996) case study of sixteen biracial girls of African-American descent who were viewed as White girls during adolescence and later chose a multiracial or African-American identity later in life shared some of the psychological and sociological layers that are part of the multiracial experience. Twine (1996) interviewed biracial students who “grew up in predominantly white, middle-class suburban communities” (p. 209). Several of the young women within the study stated that

they had used their minority racial status to obtain financial assistance for college even though they did not feel particularly culturally linked to the minority group; they had done so because they had been encouraged by counselors to do so. Twine's study contested the notion that racial identities were fixed since many of her participants changed their racial identity in college. She believed that racial identities were social constructs that were malleable and evolving. So many of the comments that the participants shared echoed my identity issues as a teenager and I viewed myself as many of the interviewees did, as not wanting to be "singled out as racially or culturally distinct by white peers" (Twine, 1996, p. 211).

When biracial individuals are forced to identify with a particular ethnic heritage because of phenotypical attributes, they can experience anxiety as a result. According to Coleman and Carter (2007), "most researchers agree that an internalization of societal prejudices can result in greater difficulty in developing a positive racial identity" (p. 105). There is a growing awareness of the need for multiracial individuals to identify with all of their ethnic bloodlines rather than choosing one heritage over another. Coleman and Carter (2007) asserted that "through recognition and eventual integration of all ethnic identities…a biracial person is able to develop a secure and healthy biracial identity" (p. 105). Besides asking research questions about racial identity and self-reporting, Coleman and Carter also wanted to understand the psychological impact of being pressured to identifying racially. Using questionnaires, the researchers recruited and surveyed 61 biracial individuals on various topics that included anxiety inventories and societal pressures. Their findings were inconclusive because of the various ways in which people choose to identify or report their identifications. The only clear finding was that those

who chose a monoracial heritage due to peer pressure were more anxious and fearful of negative evaluation. They felt that there were more factors to be researched including socioeconomic differences. Current research reveals that the multiracial identity is complex and further complicated by societal norms and views that attempt to channel identity within specific monoracial routes. This study exists to analyze and understand my multiracial identity; hopefully, the narratives contained herein and the analysis of my identity development will contribute to the multiracial identity development discussion.

The Impact of Whiteness

As I began this journey of exploration into my multiracial identity development, it was clear that I should use LatCrit Theory and reference issues related to Latinos/as since my outward appearance readily aligns me with the Hispanic community. What became apparent as I plunged further into self-reflection and research was that I also needed to look at Whiteness Studies since I am presenting myself as one possessing equal heritage in the White community. Many of the decisions that I have made with respect to self-identification and presentation of self were motivated by my sense of empowerment, a trait that is often attributed to those possessing privilege and power – my White side. I have often negated the power and privilege that comes with being labeled White because my ancestry was full of poor White people who lacked both. It is important, however, to understand the concept of Whiteness in juxtaposition to color as well as to evaluate the aspects of Whiteness that I have personally embraced during my lifetime.

In order to explore the influence of Whiteness as a construct in my identity development, I needed to investigate its impact on the Latino/a population. In Stokes-Brown's (2012) study on self-identification by Latinos, she discovered that "most Latinos

have a broader, more complex understanding of race" (p. 309). Within her study, Stokes-Brown (2012) found that more than half of the Latinos participating in the 2000 U.S. Census self-identified as White. Since my study hinges on viewing myself as half-White and predominantly Latina, I was fascinated by a study in which Latinos/as view themselves as White. A closer look revealed that findings were based upon the fact that most Latinos/as considered the options through lenses of "origins to countries where racial boundaries are loosely drawn, racial mixing is common, and race has ethnocultural connotations" (Stokes-Brown, 2012, p. 310). Basically, the U.S. Census does not share the same definition of race that most Latinos/as hold since culture and ethnicity have stronger influences on commonalities and identification. Within her study, Stokes-Brown (2012) emphasized that census population estimates assert that the Hispanic category may eventually be absorbed into the White category, along with the Asian population, leaving the predominant racial distinction between Black and White. Based upon information in the Census, the researcher interviewed Latinos/as who participated in the Census about their views of race considering factors of: "(1) national origin, phenotype, and other demographic factors, (2) socioeconomic status, (3) discrimination, (4) commonality and linked fate, and (5) acculturation/assimilation" (p. 316). Although over half of the respondents had self-identified as White on the U.S. Census, further investigation revealed that most Latinos/as do not view themselves as White, and most clearly reject a Black identity, viewing Blackness as a devalued minority status (Stokes-Brown, 2012). The research revealed that most Latinos/as view themselves as neither White nor Black, and prefer a multiracial identification over the dominant Black/White paradigm. Those who shared a sense of discrimination and higher socioeconomic status,

preferred a label of Latino/a or Hispanic as a racial identity choice. Particularly interesting to me and relevant to this study was the influence of social interactions as an impetus for self-identification; whether interactions included perceived racism or exclusion or acceptance within particular racial and/or ethnic groups.

Charles A. Gallagher (2003) conducted a study on the social and political impact of colorblindness for Whites in the United States. Since I have self-identified as colorblind for a large portion of my life, I found the study fascinating since it asserted that a colorblind posture privileges Whites by promoting a structure that is no longer based upon race. According to Gallagher (2003), "colorblindness allows many whites to define themselves as politically progressive and racially tolerant as they proclaim their adherence to a belief system that does not see or judge individuals by the 'color of their skin'" (p. 1). Using data from seventeen focus groups and thirty interviews with Whites from various regions around the United States, Gallagher (2003) discovered that many of the individuals in his study believed that meritocracy and hard work privileged individuals instead of skin color. Under the guise of egalitarianism, most Whites do not consider their successes attributable to their position in a racial hierarchy rather the result of personal performance and achievement. Additionally, rather than recognizing the influence of historical oppression, many Whites negate racist actions promoting an "ahistorical [stance] rendering the actions of the near and distant past as events that are disconnected from contemporary racial inequality" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 14). Throughout his study, Gallagher (2003) shared quotes from interviews with White individuals from varying economic and educational statuses who echoed similar refrains of the elimination of color as a factor for success and prosperity in our country. Yet, Gallagher's (2003)

study revealed that socioeconomic and political statistics paint a different picture relative to privilege with Whites still more affluent and powerful than their Black and Hispanic counterparts. In fact, "creating and internalizing a colorblind view of race relations reflects how the dominant group is able to use the mass media, immigration stories of upward mobility, rags-to-riches narratives and achievement ideology to make white privilege invisible" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 15). As I reflect on my own colorblind posture prior to this study, I realize that my thoughts echoed many of the ones that I read within Gallagher's (2003) work. I was either operating from a mentality that bought into the perspective presented in the White-dominated culture around me or I was simply viewing others from my own sense of privilege earned from hard work – my Whiteness.

As a multiracial individual who must consider the impact of Whiteness on my identity as much as the Latino/a roots within me, I found myself deeply engaged in evaluating our current president's stance on his own multiracial heritage. Not only was I intrigued by his readiness to assume an African-American racial profile over a multiracial one, I was equally irritated and angered by his willingness to seemingly ignore his relationship to his White mother. I encountered a study where researchers probed into responses of young multiracial students with respect to Barack Obama's racial identity. In Jeffries' (2012) study, the researcher found that "respondents hold favorable opinions of the President despite his inconsistent affirmation of multiracial identity" (p. 183). In fact, Obama's struggle with his multiracial identity was one with which the respondents could readily identify; he deferred to the racial ascription given him by others. Although some inferred that his alignment with the Black community was one of deliberate political savvy, most agreed that his racial positioning as the first African-American

president has brought misunderstanding and mislabeling. Jeffries (2012) shared that most respondents asserted that "unfair criticism of Obama grows from the racist belief that only white bodies can be legitimate representations of the American citizenry" (p. 198). A majority of the students within Jeffries' (2012) study believed that Obama's color led to questions about his citizenship. I wonder if Obama had taken a definitive stance as a multiracial man if he would have won the election; would he have had the endorsement of the African-American community who proudly claims his as one of their own? Although I may have initially been emotionally distraught about Obama's choice of racial alignment, I have used my Latina heritage to my educational advantage. I have employed Whiteness to my advantage as well. Jeffries (2012) reported that respondents viewed multiracial identity "as a flexible and fluid construct for [those] who choose it" (p. 198). In my opinion, Jeffries' (2012) findings present a station of unique privilege for multiracial people because they can move in and out of whichever identity positions them for privilege. I can be Latina when it suits me and I can be White when it serves me well. It is, however, difficult to be White when your skin color tells a different story. For me, Whiteness has been a mindset that I can adopt that others may accept or reject. My experience has also been that acceptance or rejection as a member, albeit adopted member, of the White community has depended upon the experiences and racial viewpoints of the individual welcoming me or denying me a White identity.

As this study progressed, I revisited literature proposing multiracial identity theory in order to connect my analysis of data generated through this endeavor to existing theory. Additionally, what I gleaned about commonalities that exist within the multiracial identity development stages were important lenses through which to view my

narratives. Not only were there similarities between multiracial identity theory models, I discovered that many of the studies were focused on the Black/White experience. Since I have spent many years of my life operating as predominantly Latina, I connected data to LatCrit theory; however, the impact of Whiteness was equally an imperative since I am not solely Hispanic. Uncovering the impact of Whiteness on my multiracial identity was not an easy task since most of the literature on multiracial identity development emphasized the bloodlines that connect people to their minority status. Viewing the data generated through my study through the lenses of multiracial identity theory, LatCrit Theory, and Whiteness Studies provided a three-pronged approach to understanding myself and my experiences. Although not contained within this chapter dedicated to related theory, literature connected to autoethnography as methodology became likewise important since the process of performing this study was as informative as the theory attached to it. Autoethnography as a methodology of exploring and informing self provided a framework for discovery; the literature reviewed in the methodology section in the next chapter was revelatory and relevant to this study as well.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders.

(Tierney, 1998, p. 66)

When I read Tierney's thoughts on autoethnography as a research approach, it resonated with my multiracial identity that has marginalized me at the borders. Despite being Daisy Mae's daughter, my physical appearance has never prompted a redneck joke. My brown skin and dark features, however, have frequently elicited comments about crossing borders illegally or being in need of a green card. My hope is that this dissertation will cross borders within the academy by uniting autoethnography and technology in a meaningful way that provides public access to my research. By granting access in an online venue, my desire is to enlighten others about multiracial identity issues in a world where the multiracial population is growing exponentially (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The multiracial identity issue inhabits many spheres; however, this study will focus on the impact of social interactions in my identity development. The introspective focus on self in this autoethnography serves to provide highly personalized accounts so that readers make emotional connections to my reflections on data that may compel change. Autoethnographic dissertations are not only gaining more acceptance as significant research studies, an autoethnographic performative study on spousal abuse won the 2010 Outstanding Dissertation Award from the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology as well as recognition from the American Educational Research Association (Tamas, 2011). I am willing to bare my soul and peel away emotional layers

since I believe that this study has the potential to provide insight as well as change perspectives on issues related to multiracial identity development.

Autoethnography as Methodology

Autoethnography is a research approach found within qualitative inquiry that is growing in popularity among researchers (Ellis, 2004). My choice to use autoethnography as the approach to this study stemmed from a personal belief that there is much knowledge to be gained from the lived experience. Autoethnography emerged from self-reflective accounts in ethnography that makes the researcher's life and experiences the focus of the research (Chang, 2006; Denzin, 1997; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Ellis (2004) asserted that ethnography is a research approach that describes people and culture. In autoethnography, the researcher is the subject, and the researcher's interpretation of the experience is the data (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Although autoethnography continues to evolve, at its core is the existence of personal narratives, narratives of the self, personal experience narratives and self-stories, first person accounts and personal essays (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography is research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social (Ellis 2004). Culture includes self and others; therefore, autoethnography cannot merely focus on self rather it is a study of self as the principal focus within the context of culture (Chang 2008). This study resides within a posture of viewing the relationship that exists between self and culture as symbiotic; each requires the other, and meaning comes from the inextricable link between them (DeMunck, 2000).

The storytelling nature of autoethnography includes a narrative approach to documenting research and analyzing data. Richardson (1995) asserted that narrative provides an approach to discovering more about one's self and the topic under investigation; a way of knowing and discovering new aspects of the topic and one's relationship to it. By using narrative to reflect on social encounters, I gained insight into my multiracial experience, and I hope that my approach will engage readers. Using narrative enables me to tell my story as well as meet an objective of compelling emotional responses and, hopefully, promoting changes in the future (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lewis, 2007).

Wall (2008) asserted that autoethnography not only involves positioning oneself in contrast to positivist research, it is the methodology that can promote change because of "the sharing of unique, subjective, and evocative stories of experience that contribute to our understanding of the social world and allow us to reflect on what could be different because of what we have learned" (p. 3). As I evaluated myself in the context of the culture in which I lived and continue to live, my hope is that my study will not only transform my understanding of multiracial identity development but impact society and culture as well. By sharing personal and interpersonal experiences, the resulting narrative may reach a wider audience because autoethnography generates texts that are emotional in nature. I used critical autoethnography to understand my multiracial identity, but this autoethnography possesses an added critical dimension in that my goal is to evoke change related to how others view and understand multiracial individuals.

Autoethnography "utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context" (Ngunjiri,

Hernandez, & Chang, 2010, p. 2). There is no other research approach that would serve as an appropriate vehicle to study my multiracial experience other than autoethnography due to the use of personal narrative and reflection via the look inward (Ellis, 2002). Autoethnography allows me to investigate data related to social encounters that helped me understand the context of being multiracial. According to Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010), there is a continuum upon which autoethnographies reside, between approaches of ethnography and autobiography where "they will continue to mix scientific inquiry and self-exploration and to express the mixture in descriptive-realistic, analytical-interpretive, confessional-emotive, or imaginative-creative writing" (p. 11) My study is a critical autoethnography because my hope is that sharing my multiracial identity development may impact how multiracials are viewed and treated by society. Choosing to evaluate my multiracial identity with the intention of sharing what I learn in order to impact change makes this study a critical autoethnography. This critical autoethnographic study hinges on analyzing social encounters that molded and continue to shape my multiracial identity. When readers interact with personal text rather than traditional research, the result may invoke compassion that compels change (Ellis, 2002).

Data Collection

This study took place over ten months, and included the development of a website that would house data sets generated for the purpose of understanding my multiracial identity development. I spent the first two weeks of the study building the website. The website contains my reflective journal as well as a copy of this study with data sets that include: (1) journal entries, (2) video interviews, (3) a one-woman show, and (4) photographs. The homepage of the website is well-organized and users will be able to

navigate the digital space easily. Data for this study located on the website was collected and generated as follows:

Journal entries.

Since the purpose of this study is to understand what being multiracial means to me, narrative entries in my online journal served as both data and analysis. As I engaged in journaling, the process produced "the kind of self-understanding [that] lies at the intersection of biography and society: self-knowledge that comes from understanding our personal lives, identities, and feelings as deeply connected to and in large part constituted by—and in turn helping to constitute—the sociocultural contexts in which we live" (Anderson, 2006, p. 390). The journal was originally designed to present memory pieces for data collection purposes; however, the reflective journal that evolved presented my thoughts and emotions during the process, and proved to be emotionally evocative and essential to this study. The journal section of the website will continue to develop as encounters related to racial identification occur within my life that prompt me to post on the blog. For the purposes of this study, I concluded my journal entries in December of 2013. Additionally, I began to add photographs to blog entries to add visual elements to my posts. Connecting visuals to the writing word in this non-linear format appealed to me personally; I hope that the pictures will capture the reader's attention and add to the experience when perusing entries. I purposefully chose pictures to reinforce the text within the blog in an effort to connect image and emotion.

One-woman show.

Positioning oneself within research as both focus and researcher changes the way in which data is collected and analyzed since data sets "are situated within personal

experience and sense making" Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003, p. 62). As the autoethnographic interrogation process ensued, it became difficult to know how to begin and where. How does the data collection process begin? What will serve as contribution and what is extraneous? Since my study is about my multiracial identity, I originally wanted to journal about memories related to racial categorization. I had brainstormed about which memories to explore during the proposal process, but I had no idea how difficult the process of journaling would actually be. I found myself dealing with a moral dilemma. Although I recall childhood incidents dealing with my racial identity, I could not remember enough specific details to create a journal entry. I wondered how much of my recollection was real and how much was imagined. Was I creating a story to meet my research objectives or were the memories real? I kept wishing that I had diaries upon which to rely, something that would validate the experiences. I wanted to be true to my experiences and I wanted to be truthful.

I decided to write a one-woman show and include the events in my life that were significant in shaping my multiracial identity. I love performing. I think that teaching is my opportunity to be on stage every day. I embrace the butterflies that inhabit my stomach before I step on stage to sing or act. As I thought about how to share the meaningful experiences of my life that impacted my multiracial identity development, choosing to write a show seemed the perfect vehicle for me. The one-woman show can be found in the Prologue of Chapter 4 or on the website designed for this study under the tab "the show" at www.burritosblackeyedpeas.com. The writing process was cathartic, and filled with intense emotions. I had always believed that I had walked through life

unscathed by racial undertones. As previously mentioned, I had always positioned myself as a color-blind individual. I had erased race. It didn't matter. Or so I thought.

I chose to weave various experiences together using myself as primary character and narrator. As a performer and as a director, my experiences have primarily included comedic roles and presentations. As I began to write, I felt a solemnity about the experience that overwhelmed me. I wanted the script to be funny, yet poignant. Eventually, the script was more about my confusion and sadness about not being tied to my mother and my daughter. Early in the writing process, my daughter called as I was working on the script. I shared with her what I had just penned. I found myself tearing up, unable to finish. I had encountered what Richardson (2000) encouraged; I had relived an experience emotionally. There was my truth. Throughout this process, I have struggled with the dichotomy of my early educational experiences with positivist research and my current encounters with the postmodern world. I wrestled with presenting absolute truth that cannot be refuted and encountering socially-constructed truth that is individual and subject to interpretation. Truth be told, no one can deny what I felt about my racial identity encounters. My feelings are valid and have a story to tell that could resonate with others in meaningful ways; my stories could impact others as they reflect on their own stories in relationship to mine (Sparkes, 2000). Additionally, the tone of my writing conveys a feeling about my life and experiences that could evoke empathy and provide the reader with a vicarious experience upon encounter with my text (Lincoln, 1993). My conversation with my daughter and the emotional onslaught that ensued validated the narrative direction that I had chosen to take.

Additionally, I was confronted with how identity construction took place in my life and I felt helpless about the changes that I could not impose upon my past. I had encountered myself in a way that was transformative because I had to face identity constructions that were imposed upon me and those which I embraced. Using self as narrator afforded me with an opportunity to "identify and critique the power relations" (Spry, 2001, p. 718) within my story. I was able to speak out and question those who I had not interrogated in my youth; this was both liberating and distressing. I was able to articulate my frustration, but I was not able to change what had happened. Spry (2001) contended that performance autoethnography allows the researcher an opportunity to create text that can be felt by both creator and reader/audience; the empathetic climate created, if written and performed well, will compel connection and self-reflective introspection that transforms. Since my desire is to promote change by choosing critical autoethnography as my methodology, performance autoethnography seemed an ideal path for my journey. The show had provided framework for data collection and a forum for narrative writing that was a familiar venue for me. Gratitude filled my heart for the process; however, I was not as prepared for the personal battles that I would have to fight with myself about what to include and how to present the incidents I had chosen to use.

Photographs.

Choosing to write a play also narrowed the photographic data that I would include in the study. I decided that I would scan the photographs that could be used during a performance of the show as the photographs for my website as well. If a picture were directly connected to a memory that was highlighted during the show, then the photographs used were the ones that needed to be available on the website as well. Early

in this study, I considered how I would choose photographs for data purposes; however, the writing of the show provided a clear direction for me as I would begin the perusal of numerous family albums. As I wrote the show, I was able to envision specific photographs that I knew existed. Since I knew which pictures I wanted, I became focused on finding them; the hunt, however, was difficult. I could not remember where I had seen the pictures. They could be in one of the numerous boxes in my basement, or in one of my sister's or mother's albums, or in the possession of one of my aunts or uncles. I spent several weeks looking for the pictures, exasperating myself and others in the process. The photograph hunt mirrored my study, frustrating yet fruitful.

For me, it was essential to include pictures in this study because photographs provide artistic representations that can be used to make meaning (Albers & Harste, 2007). The photographs that I included evoked emotional responses from me that assisted me in developing the narrative for my one-woman show as well as write my narrative analysis. Additionally, they provided a design element not only for the backdrop of my one-woman show; they served as visual text within the design of the website that I created. Not only had I been able to generating meaning from the pictures, I was deliberate in how I placed them on my digital space and within my show; photographs were essential. I also decided to use an editing tool to create a Polaroid effect as the frame for my pictures to place them within my place in history; it was a creative choice that I made that provided meaning for me. Albers and Harste (2007) asserted that design choices are deliberate vehicles for making meaning and communication; I used photographs as visual texts from which to learn and to frame created elements of data generated during this process. I included other photographs as I constructed the webspace

and made design choices *(Figure 1)*; I used black and white photographs on the website homepage to show the varying shades of skin tone in the people who are my family. I primarily used pictures of my mother and daughter, in particular, due to the distinct differences in our physical features. Photograph and website design choices were deliberate since I am aware that my visual texts may be analyzed by the readers of my study. I am also cognizant that images and layout have potential to communicate messages about my multiracial identity (Albers, 2007).

Figure 1 Website Accompanying Study

Video Interviews.

I conducted four video interviews with the following individuals: (1) myself, as primary participant; (2) my father, Timoteo Castro; (3) my mother, Daisy Mae Castro; and (4) my daughter, Bethany Grace Poplin. The edited versions of the interviews can be found at www.burritosblackeyedpeas.com under the tab "Interviews". I chose to

interview my father despite his early onset Alzheimer's because his memory about the distant past is still relatively intact. I asked him questions about his courtship of my mother because I wanted to know about his confrontations with racism as it related to their relationship. I also decided to ask him if he felt that his children encountered racism as a result of being the offspring of an interracial relationship. I wanted to know if he believed that there were potential hurdles at the onset of his relationship with my mother. I chose to interview my mother and my daughter because they are the two most significant individuals in my life with whom familial connection has been a source of debate and negation. Since I am certain that people have disavowed my relationship to both my daughter and mother, I asked them questions related to social interactions in which their relationship to me was in question. Additionally, I asked my daughter questions about her multiracial identity since physical characteristics label her as White and what significance her Mexican heritage has had in her identity development and her relationship to and with me. Her answers enlightened and frustrated me at the same time; I had no idea what she had gone through because I thought all multiracial identity issues were mine. As mentioned earlier, I had thought of other approaches to this study during the proposal process; however, the video interviews and the one-woman show provided focus and structure for this study, and I learned a great deal from the data acquired from them.

One of the primary reasons for including video interviews rather than interview transcripts within this study was the emotional and personal aspects that I wanted to present; again, the choice of presenting visual text and artistic representation of video on my website steered decision-making. Using video interviews became an integral part of

the design process in developing their location on my website; I wanted viewers to see and hear precious family members talk about their relationship to me as well as issues that they have encountered as a result of being part of my multiracial experience. I wanted the visual and audio text to tell part of my story; the addition of video interviews via usage of technology provided a multimodal experience that would provide data for analysis as well as "newer literacy" component in a digital space. Although the website I developed for this study is more about presentation of data, the process of generating data and designing its representation provided me with an experience through which I was able to be involved with my senses and my emotions. As a learner seeking to understand my multiracial identity development, the multimodal experience provided layers to the data collection process that would not have been available if I had chosen simply to write a narrative. As an educator well-versed in technology, I found the experience of creating a website that included video to be an exhilarating experience which provided rich data for the reflective process. Using technology to create a website provided me an opportunity to be artistic; producing a website was a creative venture for me that enhanced this experience and generated significant data sets for analysis. My artwork, albeit technological, provided what Albers and Harste (2007) asserted as text that may not only help me, but other readers as well, "read, feel, understand, and discern more each time [it is read]" (p. 11).

One of the challenges of the video interviews was the editing process. I could not use the complete interviews of anyone, including myself, due to the disclaimer within the permission form that allows the interviewee the opportunity to review what is presented and make changes when they are uncomfortable with what may be presented. There

were sections of my father's interview that were not applicable to the study and both my mother and daughter asked that certain portions of their interviews be deleted due to what they considered potentially damaging to relationships with family members or colleagues. As I reviewed my own interview, there were sections that I deleted and did not use due to rambling or poor storytelling on my part. Another obstacle related to video inclusion was how to embed them on the website; technical difficulties within the hosting venue kept me from loading the videos directly to the pages. After several unsuccessful attempts to embed the videos, I decided to load the videos onto YouTube and link them to my site. Although placing the videos on YouTube was a successful venture, the process was laborious and time-consuming. A second hurdle for the video inclusion was the page assignment; initially, I thought I would be able to put all of the YouTube videos on the same page. I was unable to post all of the videos on the same page so I created subpages and a dropdown menu for video access. If a reader clicks on the video heading, it will lead them to links to the subpages. I believe that the website is user friendly *(Figure 2)*.

Figure 2 User Friendly Navigation

Within autoethnography, there is an emphasis on interactive approach to interviewing and my research into using autoethnography as method points to a process that requires intense participation in interviews on the part of the researcher/participant. Kiesinger (1998, p. 129) noted that the researcher must exhibit 'a willingness to participate fully in the conversation with her subject/conversational partner, to allow her own life and story to be probed and challenged'. I was willing to share the details of my own life; however, I did decide not to mention specific colleagues or family members in the details of stories if disclosure could prove injurious to my relationships. I decided to videotape an interview of myself so that it can exist on the website alongside those of my daughter and parents. I have a tendency to follow rabbit trails and early in the research process, I realized that I could overwhelm myself with details so I purposefully limited myself to the questions that I initially designed for this study and are part of the Informed Consent Form (*Appendix C)*.

In conducting this study, I began to understand the various ways in which I negotiated my multiracial identity in various social contexts prior to and since the multiracial category became available on public documents. I believe that reflecting on social interactions in childhood and adulthood as well as participating in interviews with family members helped me understand how growing up without the opportunity to self-identify as well as possessing the option as an adult provided insight into my multiracial experience. My hope is that the insight and interviews that transpired during this study will contribute to evolving multiracial identity theories as well as promote change within venues that use demographics to sort individuals based upon ethnicity.

Presentation of Data

My life spans the most significant decades of technology development and I have kept pace with each innovation by infusing them into my personal experience. From writing binary code love notes to my fiancée in the 1980s to developing websites for sharing teaching strategies, using technology and digital spaces is the best way to represent exploration of my multiracial identity. I used Web 2.0 tools to collect and store data for this study while I sought to answer the questions: How have I internalized and interpreted encounters related to racial identification and what does being multiracial mean to me? Using digital spaces to journal and store data related to social interactions that were significant in my multiracial identity development provided an online venue filled with visual texts and audio files that will augment the study.

According to Virginia Kuhn (2010), "digital scholarship is vitally important in academia if intellectual inquiry is to be fully realized in the 21st century". Kuhn, a professor at the University of Southern California, was the first to defend a digital dissertation in 2005 and in her 2008 YouTube interview, she shared how the hyperlinks on her digital dissertation provided images and video that enhanced her textual descriptions and created greater understanding (Lange, 2008). Additionally, Bamford (2005) stated that online spaces should be used for research since it is a "process of revelation, innovation and invention, [and] a range of contemporary languages need to be accepted in the presentation of dissertations" (p. 2). The 21st century continues to reveal newer technologies and literacies at an incredible pace and scholars pursuing relevance for research should employ sources that provide opportunity for interactivity and multisensory experience (Bamford, 2005). Although many universities present

dissertations online in a .pdf format, scholars should "also take advantage, in a kind of probing, beginning way, of the expanded capabilities inherent in this way of presenting a dissertation" (Brace, 2006). Since I agree with these scholars about digital presentation, I have a tandem online component that contains a .pdf file of my dissertation as well as provides access to multimedia data sets that accompany the narrative contained therein. My website can be found at www.burritosblackeyedpeas.com . I secured a URL for my study that would reflect its contents and be memorable to those who choose to share it with others.

Providing my one-woman show with relevant photographs, a copy of my study and abstract, and edited versions of the video interviews online as well as my reflections of the process in an online journal makes the contents of my website culturally relevant and meaningful. The non-linear format of my study will make it available to a wider audience which will assist in the critical aspirations of this autoethnography. By placing my study online, I will be moving towards what Lang (2002) presented as the technology-infused world that academia is becoming. Lang (2002) concluded that professors have an ethical "responsibility to equip students for their futures" rather than "preparing [them] for an environment that no longer exists" (p. 694). I agree and hope that my study will be a bridge between traditional formats and online presentations by integrating the two experiences. I believe that the visual and auditory components will enhance my study and provide insight to the readers that will enrich the text provided.

Methods of Making Meaning

Since this study focuses on data generated from personal journal entries, video interviews, and memories presented in a performance format with photographs, the road

to making meaning from what exists within the data sets was an ongoing task that required stepping outside of the personal and viewing data sets as researcher. Rather than coding data or sorting data for the purpose of generating thematic units, I spent time questioning the choices that I made within the performance piece that emerged in order to gain understanding into why and how events impacted my developing multiracial identity. Additionally, I reviewed the video interviews numerous times in order to make connections to what was shared and my multiracial identity formation. Kaufmann (2012) explained how autoethnographic narratives equip a researcher with understanding as well as provide opportunities to make meaning and connections when she stated, "Caressing my stories, one by one, I set them down before you so that I may meet myself that I may meet you" (p.19). As I sought to understand my multiracial identity, I revisited my show and reflective journal in order to analyze the 'stories' experientially. By pursuing sensory and emotion responses to actual events in my life, I was, as Kaufmann (2011) asserted, "search[ing] for the virtual in the actual. Virtual elements, although unseen, become "known" through sensation when one encounters a disequalizing event. It is in the small feeling that something is not quite right as well as the encounter of one's world off center and out of order that the virtual becomes recognized" (p. 153). Autoethnography afforded me the luxury of investigating self through personal means in an effort to understand my multiracial identity development and my multiracial self. I attempted to articulate the emotional responses, some of them acutely intense, that I encountered when I wrote the one-woman show and penned the entries in the reflective journal. I fully immersed myself in the process and allowed myself to feel every raw emotion thoroughly. Although

the emotional experiences were cathartic, it was the understanding of self and/or culture that transpired that made meaning for me.

During the study, making meaning of what I had learned about my multiracial identity development became a holistic event. The events that I chose were emotionally evocative, and were "the structures through which I make sense of my world, locating my particular biographical experiences in larger historical and sociological contexts" (Richardson, 2007, p. 483). Collecting and analyzing data within a qualitative study is a rigorous endeavor; however, the process was further complicated within my study because the process became circular. In order to make meaning of the fragments of my life, I created a list of social encounters that I believed influenced my multiracial identity development. After deliberation, I chose to work through the list by sharing vignettes within the context of a performance narrative that included personal photographs. Although the one-woman show followed a series of events in my life, the emotional response and subsequent analysis provided data for this study. Events that transpired in my life during the research process provided musings for a reflective journal; what I learned about self and process also provided data sets that worked their way into the narrative analysis presented in Chapter Four. Finally, interviews conducted with self and family members that imposed upon my study provided data to interpret as well. There was an overlapping in the process that was both confusing and revelatory; I could not extrapolate data to examine sets independently. The data existed in intersections of memory, reflection, analysis, and interpretation. Making meaning of social encounters became the process that Wolcott (1994) articulated as a method that does not have "lines clearly drawn where description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes

interpretation" (p. 11). Wolcott (1994) asserted that good qualitative research involves storytelling that includes the aforementioned characteristics of description, analysis, and interpretation. The process that I used with respect to data aligns well with Wolcott's (1994) proposals; I spent a great deal of time on the reflective process, using reflections as data and to generate data. The narrative analysis and subsequent findings provide my interpretations of how various social encounters impacted my multiracial identity development as I continually asked myself, "What does being multiracial mean to me?" My research question was a guide through the circular process that often felt like being caught up in a tornado with data sets circling around me, colliding with me, and forever changing me.

My data collection, analysis, and interpretation progression took place as follows: (1) I created a list of social encounters that I readily recalled as important with respect to race and racism in my life; (2) I created a website with pages for each of the sections of data that I wanted to present with this study; (3) I started journaling about each item on the list, but chose to present the most significant events in a one-woman show that I penned because I did not have enough memories for substantial journal entries; (3) I considered which photographs to add as a backdrop to the show and added them to text (the process of finding photographs was arduous as I recalled specific pictures during the writing process that I wanted to use); (4) I wrote journal entries about the research process and social encounters in the present that were influencing my multiracial identity revelations; and (5) I conducted interviews with my father, my mother, my daughter, and myself in order to hear the voices that were noteworthy in my multiracial identity development and postures. Although these events appear linear, the reality was an

overlapping undertaking; the only incident that did not infringe on others was the initial list. The website construction began with an initial framework; however, the final product was an evolutionary experience that morphed with every detour. After each writing process or data collection event, I would mull over its impact during fitness ventures. I would revisit journal entries, and then go on a run. I would find a picture that I had envisioned while writing; I would scan the picture before leashing my dog to go on a run in the neighborhood. I would reread the one-woman show, and strap on my trail shoes to journey the five-mile trek at Kennesaw Mountain. I could envision the photographs in my mind's eye as my feet pounded the ground. My runs are important to me; I don't clear my mind, I fill it. I use my running time for personal reflection and meditation so it was the perfect venue for reflecting on writing and experiential data production. There were a few social encounters that brought up painful memories of rejection or marginalization due to perceived racism. Often I would finish the run covered with sweat and tears; it was liberating. As a researcher, the nonlinear structure of the data allowed themes to emerge that became the framework for the narrative analysis that ensued. I began to analyze various social encounters and attempt to understand how they served to shape me and my multiracial identity.

During one of my runs, I thought of Shakespeare's words which present the play format as a metaphor for life. The pieces were coming together. I chose to present my analysis in a five-act play; for me, this was an ideal form for narrative analysis. Not only was my goal to "write from the heart, bring the first person in my work, and merge art and science" since this is a research study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 761), the task of making meaning of the narratives were determined by how I [the storyteller] wish to be

viewed by others and how I position myself within the story (Roulston, 2010). Narrative analysis allowed for methodical study of personal experience and meaning. The approach enabled me to study the "active, self-shaping quality of human thought, the power of stories to create and refashion personal identity" (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, xiv). As I sought to understand the fashioning of my multiracial identity, it became imperative to fully explore the emotions within the narrative that I created as well as evaluate how and where I situated myself within the narrative in order to gain insight into my multiracial identity development. I fully felt and attempted to describe my experiences to my readers in an effort to create an empathetic tone that may compel others to understanding and change (Jones, 2007). I also believe that focusing on the social interactions and interpersonal relationships of my life provided rich data for this study since "the basic generation of meaning is always social, for the meanings with which we are endowed arise in and out of interactive human community" (Crotty, 2003, p. 55).

Ethical Issues

One of the most significant aspects of this study is its intensely personal nature. Although it is perfectly acceptable for me to reveal my innermost thoughts, I had to contend with the relational aspect of interpreting and sharing those of my significant others when I present interview data. It is important to consider relational ethics since I must approach others on a foundation of mutual respect (Ellis, 2007). Not only was shared respect significant to this study, the storytelling that ensued relied upon the confidence that others have placed upon me when I share details and perceptions from my perspective. As Knaus (2009) shared, storytelling is a powerful CRT tool that not only affirms minority experiences, but also propels them to relevance in arenas where

policies are made due to the intensity of the emotional responses that stories tend to ignite. A well-told story can provoke an intense reaction that compels change and narratives within autoethnographies can be transformative for everyone involved, from participant to reader (Jones, 2007). As I shared details that are emotional for me from my multiracial experiences, I realized the power of perspective and was careful to assert that my story was being told from my perspective and from my recollection of events as well as my reflection of data gleaned from interview. I am also cognizant of my academic responsibility to contribute to the growing conversation of multiracial identity development via this critical autoethnography, and it is a responsibility that I do not take lightly. When my story included the story of others, I took responsibility for presenting their points of view by allowing them to read the data sets and interject their personal interpretations. My parents and daughter trusted my interpretation; however, they did ask for sections of their interviews to be deleted because they shared stories that could jeopardize relationships with family members and/or colleagues. Ellis (2007) contended that we need to honor relationships while still presenting ourselves and our lives truthfully; we must "consider which questions to ask, which secrets to keep, and which truths are worth telling" (p. 26). It was imperative to have conversations with my parents and daughter that helped them understand that this study is told from my perspective and my vantage point with respect to how I review and relate the interviews in which they participated as well as how I recall interpersonal interactions. They did not impose upon the findings or my telling; their only wish was to exclude potentially harmful interjections on their part. I honored their requests.

Issues of Quality

When approaching research from an autoethnographic approach, one must contend with issues of quality rather than concern oneself with validity. Feldman (2003) contended that the word quality more clearly applies to narratives of studying ourselves, but we must be careful when presenting findings so that studies resonate with truth to the reader. Ellis (2004) asserted that readers decide if a narrative speaks to them about their experiences or those of others who they know when reviewing the generalizability of an autoethnography. I evaluated my personal motives in choosing stories and visuals that were part of this study; I had to ask myself if I was silencing or privileging anyone as a result of my decisions (Hart, 2002). Hart (2001) also asserted that using a narrative approach creates issues of quality since storytelling provides meaning through interpretation rather than from analysis. By sharing my multiracial story in an online venue, I understand that issues of quality may arise from the data selection process due to purposeful inclusion or exclusion.

Approaches to qualitative data collection and analysis vary greatly. Autoethnographic studies that employ narrative diverge from other qualitative methods with respect to coding and discovery of emerging themes. The impact of this study will emerge if the narrative speaks to others about their own lives or the lives of people that they know – if they can relate to the story in a meaningful and transformative way. My study strove to meet the criteria for excellent qualitative research as set forth by Tracy (2010) which include worthiness, rigor, relevance, and resonance. According to Tracy (2010), a study is worthy if it is relevant, timely, significant, and interesting; my study is extremely relevant due to the current anti-Hispanic sentiments and legislation that is impacting multiracials due to reliance upon physical characteristics. The rigor of a study,

according to Tracy (2010) relates to the layers and complexities within applied theory and data collection; my approach of integrating technology into the presentation as well as applying emerging multiracial, LatCrit, and Whiteness theories echoes the timeliness of the study as well as demonstrates the depth of study. Relevance and resonance relate to emotional responses within and to the study; I believe that sharing first person narratives will create empathy that may transform the societal beliefs of my readers. My hope is that the tools used within this study, from online journaling to narrative reflection, will be accessed by the general population during and after it has met the academic requirements of dissertation so that others can reflect on the conversations that compel, frustrate, and negate multiracial identity development within our society.

Although I fully understand that my study resides within a pursuit of a degree and has an academic focus, allowing the general public access to my study places it within a non-traditional venue that may present a tenuous relationship with quality. I would argue that the webpage and online components of this study strengthen it as a sincere approach to gaining understanding and impacting the individuals who would most benefit from reading the reflective process that I undertook. According to Tracy (2010), sincerity is one of the eight criteria for quality in qualitative research; she asserted, "research is marked by honesty and transparency" (p. 841). I was willing to bear my soul in a global forum and believe that my willingness to do so is one of the reasons that this study will be genuine and revelatory. Additionally, Tracy (2010) believes that quality research resonates with a variety of audience and influences and moves readers. The aesthetics of this study will emanate from the presence of visual text as well as the personal and

narrative approach to writing. My hope is that readers will "feel, think, interpret, react, or change" (Tracy, 2010, p. 845) as a result of interacting with my study.

As researcher, I am aware that my choices will shape the outcome of this study and telling of my story. Much of my life story has already been written, and my multiracial identity is well-formed even though I am only beginning to discover the layers that exist within it. This study served to help me realize what being multiracial means to me. Since this effort is so deeply personal, my greatest challenge was to step back from the data sets and evaluate them from a scholar's perspective. As I sought to make meaning of the social encounters in my life that shaped my multiracial identity, I had to step outside of myself in order to better understand myself. My story was told from my perspective as participant and as observer since I both created and evaluated the data sets. Hopefully, what emerged from this study is an understanding of self that communicates to others; my hope is that readers and audience members will gain understanding related to multiracial identity issues that will promote both personal and societal change.

CHAPTER 4
WHAT BEING MULTIRACIAL MEANS TO ME

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances,

And one man in his time plays many parts.

(Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII)

Within this chapter, I have chosen to reflect upon my life as a play. The plot involves the development of my multiracial identity throughout my lifetime, and there are numerous characters that play significant roles in the shaping of that identity. This chapter focuses on what I gleaned from writing a one-woman show, the journaling process, and analysis of visual and written texts.

PROLOGUE: The One-Woman Show

Originally, I created a list of social encounters in which racial ascription played a role in my life. My initial plan was to write a journal entry about each event and analyze journal entries for themes related to multiracial identity development. The plan evolved into the creation of the one-woman show that follows; this is a compilation of what I came to view as the most significant encounters in my life. Weaving story and visual components to be projected onto a screen are included within the text that follows; these components can be found on my website as well.

GROWING UP ON BURRITOS & BLACK-EYED PEAS
(a one-woman show)

CHARACTER(S): Marie, a middle-aged woman who assumes all roles through simple costume changes and vocal inflection.

SETTING: On the stage, there is a screen that is placed upstage center to be used

for projecting pictures during the performance. A podium rests downstage left, with a trunk beside it. Within the trunk are various costume and props to be used throughout the show. There is a wooden student desk placed downstage right.

(A woman in her early fifties sits at the desk; the stage is dimly lit and a spotlight gradually lights the woman as she begins to speak. She has a form on the desk and a pencil in her hand, which she uses to mark her answers.)

MARIE:

NAME: Marie Castro Bruner

AGE: 53

DATE OF BIRTH: September 20, 1959

MARITAL STATUS: Married

RACE: *(long pause)*…hmmmm

(lights fade—a picture of Marie's first grade classroom appears on the screen behind her; she goes to the trunk and pulls out a white blouse and hair bow. She puts on the blouse and sweeps her hair to the side with the bow. She moves downstage center and sways from side to side as she delivers her lines in a child's voice.)

My first grade class in Valdosta, Georgia (1965-66); my face and the Chocolate Boy's face are circled.

MARIE: Yes, ma'am. I know his name isn't "Chocolate Boy". Yes ma'am, I know I shouldn't ever call someone by a name that their momma or daddy didn't give them. Yes

ma'am. I know you'll be calling my momma…*(pause)* again. But I'm not sorry…not one single bit. You didn't hear him when he asked me who my "used to be momma" was. He said that my momma is not my real momma and that's there's no way that I'm her little girl and…*(she begins to sob softly)* Yes, ma'am. I know sticks and stones can break my bones and words will never hurt me, but…*(she looks up through the tears)*...that's a LIE!!!

The Castro Family in the Philippines (1965)

(MARIE returns to the trunk and exchanges the bow for a headband that she puts on and pulls back tightly. She moves to the desk and sits back down. A family portrait from the Philippines shows up on the screen; gradually fading in as Marie speaks.)

MARIE: *(Leaning as if talking to a classmate, showing her a picture and pointing out people to her friend)* This is a picture of my family that I brought for show and tell today. That's my dad and that's my mom, that's my brother (he's not very nice to me), that's my baby sister, and that's my baby brother. And that's our maid. No, that's not my mom. *(pointing to a specific location on the picture)* That's my mom. *(shaking her head angrily)* No, I don't look more like the maid. She is SO my mother. I do SO look like her. And my daddy says that I act like her too. *(She pulls the picture in close to her and repeats to herself).* I do not look like the maid; I'm just like my mother!

Daisy Mae Horton, Age 15 (1955)

March 31, 1955 (My parents' wedding day)

Timoteo Castro, Age 21 (1955)

(The picture fades on the screen as the lights fade. MARIE moves to the trunk and gets out a wrap. The wrap is made of a handmade patchwork quilt and a colorful Mexican serape. She moves to the podium and a soft spotlight shines on her while she speaks. Pictures of Marie's parents fill the screen.

MARIE: My father was born in Brownsville, Texas, but was raised in Tampico, Mexico. He did not learn how to speak English until he was a teenager. He dropped out of high school to join the U.S. military. His first assignment was to Robins Air Force Base in Georgia. That's where he met my mother. He dated my mother's older sister first. When Aunt Marie took him home to meet her family, he was quickly and strongly attracted to her younger sister, Daisy Mae. Daisy was a 9th grader who had missed out on being a cheerleader because her family was too poor to purchase the uniform. She was the second daughter of seven children of a sharecropper. Her highest dream in life was to be happily married. The dark-skinner foreigner fascinated her and she was wooed by his kindness to her and to her family. She dreamed of traveling to exotic locations and married him at the tender age of fifteen. Their whirlwind courtship and his quick reassignment to Germany left her alone to raise her first child, a son, my older brother. When he returned to the U.S., they were assigned to Lubbock, Texas. In 1959, I was born in the dusty city of northeast Texas. My mother was 19 when she gave birth to me. My parents spent three years in Texas, the longest of their military assignments, and my younger sister was born there as well. Although we lived in Texas, we lived far away from my Mexican relatives although my little "abuelita" came to visit often to help my mother when she had her baby girls. We moved back to Georgia, then to the Philippines, to New York, and then back to Georgia. Our lives were a series of adjustments between cultures, but the culture clashes that we felt most acutely were those within our own family.

(Images from Marie's early childhood appear on the screen in a slideshow that relate to her speech; Marie takes off her wrap and pulls out a blouse from the trunk that looks "Mexican". She moves downstage center).

My picture for a Baby Beauty Contest (1960)

Grandma Porfiria taking care of my brother and me (1962)

Celebrating Easter with my Horton cousins (1966)

MARIE: *(facing stage right)* But momma, I don't get it. Why does Lisa get to sit at the table with the grownups? I can't help it if I don't know how to make biscuits and gravy. I'm older than she is . And Tim's older than she is. This just isn't fair. *(she pauses and moves to face stage left)* No, daddy, I didn't know that I was telling abuelita that I was pregnant. I know I'm only fourteen and that I've really upset her. I was just trying to talk to her in Spanish and tell her about being embarrassed about something. No, I didn't know that "embarazada" means pregnant. I'm really sorry. I'll tell her that I'm sorry. *(pause, furrows her brow and then asks)* Daddy, how do you say "I'm sorry" in Spanish?

(Lights fade and Marie moves to the trunk where she pulls on a t-shirt that has "SPIC" ironed on to the front of it.)

MARIE: *(delivers her lines from downstage center as if she is presenting to a class)* My father's name is Timoteo Castro and my mother's name is Daisy Mae. My dad is from Mexico, but he grew up in Texas. My mom is from Georgia. We didn't learn how to speak Spanish in our home because…well, because my mother doesn't speak Spanish and because my dad thought it would confuse us. That's why I'm in this class. Even though my last name is Castro, I haven't really heard that much Spanish in my life. I've only visited my dad's family in Texas and Mexico about four or five times in my life because we're a military family. Any questions? *(responds)* Oh this *(tugging at her shirt to reflect the question posed)*, this is for my AP class. What does it mean? I'm pretty sure it's a nickname for Mexican people. *(looks uncomfortable and quickly changes the subject)* Anyhow, my mother learned how to cook Mexican food from my grandmother and my dad says that she cooks as well as anyone in his family. Today, she has made enchiladas, rice, and beans. It's my dad's favorite meal. Buen provecho … enjoy!

(Marie returns to the desk to fill out another form.)

MARIE: NAME: Marie Evelyn Castro

AGE: 17

DATE OF BIRTH: September 20, 1959

MARITAL STATUS: Single

RACE: *(long pause)*…hmmmm, what will help pay for college? *(bubbling a choice)* Hispanic

(Lights fade. MARIE returns to the podium and puts on her quilt/serape wrap. Pictures appear on the screen, accompanied by soft music, reflecting Marie's high school summary.)

Mama Daisy making Mexican food for my Spanish class (1974)

A family photo outside of church (1975)

My Mexican Fiesta graduation party, complete with piñata (May 1977)

MARIE: Once my father retired from the military, our family settled in South Georgia. High School was the first time that we stayed in a location longer than 18 months, except for our first assignment in Lubbock, Texas. High school was the first time that I was not surrounded by other military kids…and other multiracial kids. My high school was predominately black and there were very few Hispanics in South Georgia during the late 1970s. High school was when I dealt with the question "What are you?" Some assumed that I was Cuban because of my last name, but quite a few students thought I was Chinese since most of the forms that we filled out limited our options to White, Black, and Chinese. I think that race was not a big deal during my 9th grade year in South Dakota because I look American Indian. I don't even remember the question being asked…that is, until I returned to Georgia. Toward the end of my high school career, I was able to choose Hispanic as an option. It troubled me to be Hispanic, not because I wasn't proud of my Mexican heritage, but because I wasn't acknowledging my connection to my mother…Then again, rarely did anyone let me be connected to my mother.

(Marie pulls out a monogrammed sweater from the trunk and returns to the desk.)

MARIE: *(The lights come up gradually as Marie leans as she talks to a classmate, showing her a picture and pointing out family members to a friend)* That's my dad and that's my mom, that's my brother (he's at Georgia Tech; he just got married), that's his wife, that's my younger sister, and that's my baby brother (they're both in high

Moving in to my freshman dorm room at Agnes Scott (August 1977)

school). Yes, that's my mom. *(shaking her head sadly)* I know I don't look like her. Yes, she's really pretty. No, she's not my dad's second wife. She is my real mother. I know she looks really young. She is really young. My parents married when she was 15 and she had me when she was 19. In fact, I told her the other day that, if I were her, I'd be married with 2 kids by now and she told me that she was glad that I was getting an education. I promise. I swear. That is my mother.

Picking beans with my sister at the farms of Tifton (1978)

Intramural basketball group shot (1978) -- note that I am wearing my famous "spic" shirt

My senior portrait for Agnes Scott (1981)

(Lights fade; Marie returns to the podium and puts on her wrap of multicultures. Lights come up gradually while pictures of her college years fill the screen.)

MARIE: I spent my college years trying to fit in. This was no easy task because I was not an affluent white girl from privilege. I was a multiracial girl from a low-income family. Enlisted men in the military just don't make that much money and my father always wanted my mother to stay home to take care of us and him. I received a great deal of financial support due to our financial status and my ethnic heritage. I chose to be Hispanic during these years because it was financially beneficial to me. I really don't think that I would have been able to go to college, or at least the college I went to, had I not made that decision. I went to college with the intention of majoring in Spanish and being a Spanish teacher, but I took a detour. Most of the Spanish majors at my school were native speakers and I was not. I was filled with insecurity and chose to pursue a major in theater with a minor in French. I had no plans and no idea what I wanted to do. My parents could not guide me through this process because neither of them had finished high school. I floundered a bit. The only stable thing in my life during college was my church life.

(Marie takes off her wrap and returns to the trunk to get a "60's" headband and a poodle skirt. She moves downstage center)

MARIE: *(in an announcer's voice)* Ladies and gentlemen, put your hands together for our next group: "The Chic Spic and the Back to the Bible Boogie Band". *(Marie pauses*

and pulls off the headband to speak to the audience.) I'm not really sure why no one ever told me that I was using a derogatory term to identify myself. Here I was at a college retreat, calling myself a "spic", and no one, I mean no one, pulled me aside and tried to redirect me. Two people who I greatly respected, my high school history teacher and my pastor, allowed me to malign myself without ever speaking up. As a teacher and advisor of teenagers, I make it a point to "preach" to my students about their representations of self. How do they want others to view them? What they wear, what they do, and what they say matters. I don't even recall how I got the label to stick to myself, but I do know that I would not have used it if I had known that it had such a negative connotation. I cannot, in my wildest dreams, ever imagine a situation in which educators and pastors would allow a Black child to wear a shirt with the "N" word emblazoned prominently on it. I didn't know. *(pause)* Did they?

(Marie removes the costume pieces and returns them to the trunk. She takes out a veil and wedding band which she places on her finger. She wraps the wrap around her waist and moves to the podium.)

Getting ready to walk down the aisle (Sept. 5, 1981)

This picture helps me to understand why some people think that I must be Asian (Sept. 5, 1981)

Grandma Horton was able to be with us on our special day. (Sept. 5, 1981)

MARIE: I met my husband during my senior year of college. We were married in September after graduation in May. I was a mother by the following July. I gained 105 pounds in the process. I had gone from student to wife to mother. I looked at the fair-skinned little girl wrapped in my tan arms. *(use the wrap to create a swaddled baby to sing to, singing)* Bethany Grace, you've got a sweet little face…you hold a very special place in mommy's heart…*(stops singing)* I don't care what they say, you're not a "mayonnaise baby"…you're my precious girl and you look just like my mom. And you have a perfect nose like your daddy's, not like this crooked Aztec nose of mine. I know it's weird that my mom had a baby when I had you and that people think you belong to her and that my little brother Benjamin belongs to me, but you're mine… I know how much weight I gained with you and I know how many hours I was in labor. You're my baby! My sweet baby girl! *(carefully places the child in an imaginary cradle and hums*

the lullaby; moves back to the podium. Pictures of Marie with her children serve as the background.)

Easter Pictures with my baby girl (1985)

Bethany Grace Bruner entered our lives shortly after marriage (July 28, 1982)

Easter pictures with my baby boy (1985)

Two years later, I would have another child, a son. Aaron looks just like me; he has dark skin, dark eyes, and dark hair. No one ever doubts that he's mine. My husband and I joke about the fact that people must think that we look like we're divorcees with children from previous marriages. Jokes…I'd have to say that I've spent most of my life joking about my upbringing. There is a lot of fodder for humor to be had in the cultural and language clashes that occurred almost daily in my home, but one thing I learned in one of my foundations to theater classes was that comedy, by its very nature, can be cruel. We laugh at what causes pain, from slapstick comedy to political satire to social critique. I don't honestly think that every time I told a joke about my family that I was attempting to cover up my pain using humor. *(goes to the trunk to get a cup for a prop and moves downstage right)* Sometimes, I was just working for the laugh. *(Pictures of Marie with her husband and children fill the stage behind her.)*

Family portrait for a church directory (1996)

Teacher of the Year Celebration (2005)

Spring break at Panama City (2000)

The laugh...the smiles...the song lyrics that talk about both that hide the pain. Let me be clear. I have not spent my life in sadness nor crippled by heartache over my racial background. But there has been pain when people have denied my relationship to two

precious women in my life...my mother and my daughter. They have my heart and fill my heart, but our outward appearance does not connect us and that, at times, has been painful. *(images of Marie with her mother and daughter serve as background)* All three of us have had to defend our connections. I take that back, Bethany and Mama Daisy look alike and are very much alike. No one can deny that they are grandmother and granddaughter. It's the connection to me that has been negated from time to time...and strongly. There's the point of pain. No child and no parent should have to defend a relationship because others are so certain that it cannot be true. And yet...it has happened.

Bethany as a freshman (1996)

Post graduation celebration with Mama Daisy and Bethany (May 2000)

Mother/daughter picture for Bethany's senior yearbook (2000)

MARIE: Vietnamese? Nope. Chinese? Nope. Hawaiian? Don't even try to picture me in a hula skirt. *(pause)* Alright. I'll tell you. I'm Mexican, Indian, Irish, Scottish, French, and German…that's two different kinds of Indian. Basically, I'm pretty much just a Heinz 57 mutt. I have a great grandmother who was full blooded Cherokee and my dad's grandmother was full blooded Aztec. My dad's name is Timoteo Castro and my mamma is Daisy Mae Horton Castro. On one side, I have relatives named Porfiria, Margarita, Nacho, Modesto, Moyito, and Nila. On the other side, I have an aunt Bessie Belle, a cousin Q-ball, and an uncle named Boyman. My mother's father is Stonewall Jackson Horton and she was raised in the country. I grew up on grits and tortillas. I celebrate Christmas with tamales and New Year's with collard greens and black-eyed peas. My father didn't learn English until he was almost an adult so his English has a heavy Mexican accent and my mother is as Southern as they come y'all. My daddy called my mom "Lazy Mae" to get on her nerves and she called him "Timoto Castorio" to get on his. I got in a lot of trouble growing up because I teased my parents a lot about their accents and imitated them a LOT. My father told me I was a "make funner", but I couldn't help it. My parents entertained me and I used their accents to entertain others. I love telling stories about them so when you ask me what race I am; I have to ask you…which parent matters most? *(Pictures of Marie's parents and family fade in and out on the screen as Marie quietly leaves the stage.*

Family Portrait Day in the Philippines (1966)

Family Vacation in Japan (1972)

Family Portrait (Christmas 2001)

Reflections on the Prologue:

The one-woman show is presented within this study as the prologue to the five acts that follow; as a prologue, it provides the background for the stories that are shared within the narrative analysis. Significant to the prologue is the inclusion of photographs for the backdrop behind the speaker. Choosing to present the images in black and white was deliberate on my part because I wanted to visually represent racial categorization; when discussing biracial identity, most people think of the Black/White combination before considering other options (Rockquemore, 1999). After writing the one-woman show, some sections evoked stronger memories and responses within me than others. The sections that revealed themselves as more emotionally evocative were included within the following narrative analysis with subsequent connection to theories tied to this study. Analysis included impact of Whiteness Studies, connection to LatCrit Theory, application of multiracial identity theories, and significance of autoethnography as methodology.

ACT ONE: Chocolate Boys and Mayonnaise Babies

Scene 1

"Marie Evelyn Castro?"

"Here."

"Which name do you go by child?"

Pause.

"My name is Marie."

This was the first time that I chose a name for myself. My family called me Evelyn. I had been Evelyn my whole life – all six years of it. I was named after my maternal grandmother, Marie Slaughter Horton, and my mother's sister, Thelma Evelyn Horton. My father wanted to name me Augustina Maria Castro. He had a dear friend whose wife was named Augustina. Maria was not only a popular Spanish name, but it would be the Spanish version of my mother's beloved mother's name. I shudder to think what I would have been called through the years. I feel certain that my mother's family would have called me "Gussie" or better yet, "Gussie Mae" in deference to my mother. When my first grade teacher called out my name, it was my opportunity to choose a name that I wanted to be called. For some reason, I wanted my school name to be Marie. To this day, my family still calls me Evelyn. My colleagues know me as Marie. There is a duality that exists in my life, and my awareness of it began in first grade. There are times in our lives that are forever etched in our memories. First grade was a seminal season for me; I discovered a great deal about myself. Stories from that year are ones that I remember best, and tell most often.

I stayed after school a lot in first grade. I would always tell my mother that I had to stay after school because I was struggling in class. My father was stationed in the Philippines so my mother was on her own with four small children. After a few late afternoons, my mother decided to investigate my afternoon tutoring sessions. She decided

to approach my teacher about how she could help me at home because I did not seem to be struggling at all.

> *"Mrs. Willis, what can I do to help Evelyn, I mean, Marie at home so that she doesn't have to stay after school so much?*
>
> *"Mrs. Castro, Marie is not staying after school because she needs help. She is staying after school because she cannot resist the urge to help me teach the class."*
>
> *"Oh my. I'm so sorry. She does have a problem with talking."*
>
> *"She just can't seem to control herself. She feels compelled to help me teach."*

My emerging teacher identity was shaped early in my life. Later, I would rally neighborhood kids together to play school. I was always "the teacher". Not only did my teacher identity reveal itself early in my life, but my multiracial identity began taking shape in the first grade.

I wish I remembered his name. He will always be the "Chocolate Boy" to me. During my video interview, I experienced an epiphany related to the Chocolate Boy:

> *In first grade, a little boy, the only little Black boy in my first grade class, asked me who my "used to be momma" was. He was insistent that my mother could not be my mother because she was White. I was just as insistent that she was my mother because I don't think I really knew the difference or knew about skin color or even thought about skin color. I don't think that even in that situation I was thinking about skin color. I just knew who my mother was and that this little boy was denying my connection to her. As I look back on it, I realize that he was a little Black boy making the very first entrance into a segregated first grade, and*

> *there had probably been some conversations in his home about race and about difference. So he noted difference quicker than I had.* (Bruner & Bruner, interview audio file, 2013).

During my interview, it occurred to me, for the first time, that his need to point out color may have come from conversations at home. His presence in my first grade classroom was noticeable; he was being integrated into a predominantly White situation. He probably wondered about my brownness. The Chocolate Boy stayed after school because he was struggling in school. The teacher spent a great deal of time telling my classmates not to make fun of him and to be nice to him. Rather than using class time to help the Chocolate Boy, my teacher let him stay after school with the little girl who wanted to help teach. She would let me explain things to him, and I was delighted to help a classmate. Often our conversations would veer from the curriculum:

> *So you're telling me that White lady that picks you up every day is yo' mama.*
>
> *Yes.*
>
> *Ain't no way!*
>
> *She is so my mama.*
>
> *Naw, girl. Tell da' truth. Who's your "used to be" mama?*
>
> *She is my mama! You come to my car after school and you can ask her yourself.*
>
> *Naw. If you say she's yo' mama…well, then.*

Whether or not he ever believed me or not is inconsequential to me. What matters is that someone doubted my relationship to the most significant woman in my life – my mother. My mother and I talked a lot about the Chocolate Boy. First of all, she was concerned about the freedom that I felt to call him the Chocolate Boy. She didn't want

me to focus on color, and she didn't want me to be prejudiced. Secondly, she wanted to assure me that he did not understand our relationship because he had never seen my father. I didn't care. It hurt. I liked the Chocolate Boy, but I didn't like having to defend my relationship to my mother.

Reflections on Act 1, Scene 1

The tenets of LatCrit theory impose upon this scene since race and racism were highly significant factors in this story. The children within my first grade classroom were all White (including half of me); we chose to name this little boy "Chocolate". Who gets to name and be named are power issues that the founders of LatCrit theory considered important since they adhere to the essences of Critical Race Theory (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). The first tenet outlined by LatCrit Theory was the intercentricity of race and racism (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005); the White children in my classroom were labeling a child based upon skin color and race. The Chocolate Boy was the only Black child in my classroom; he was singled out with a label imposed upon him. Whiteness Studies come into play as well since being White enables name-calling that distinguishes that which is non-White; he was "Chocolate". As a daughter of a White mother, I assumed my posture of a racial rung higher than him in society. I did not allow him to define me even though all of us had categorized him; this was significant.

According to multiracial identity scholars, there are crisis moments in a biracial person's life that invoke a particular racial posture (Poston, 1990; Root, 1996; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). First grade held my moment because I could not erase the color of my skin. I could not make my skin White so that everyone would not doubt the deep connection I had to my mother. My multiracial identity was initiated

by skin color distinction. According to Brunsma and Rockquemore (2001), "color is both a personal and a social characteristic; that is, one perceives their skin color, but one also interprets their appearance through the eyes of others within any given interactional sphere" (p. 230). Whether or not I was aware of skin color prior to first grade, it became an important factor due to my interaction with the Chocolate Boy. In Poston's (1990) five-stage model of biracial identity, the first stage is one of personal identity when biracial children are unaware of their mixed-race heritage. I had blissfully lived in ignorance; my first grade social encounter with the Chocolate Boy forever changed my self-perception. Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) set up a model of biracial identity development based upon age that, according to their research, exemplified evolution in racial awareness. According to Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) model, there is a stage that occurs upon entry to school in which increased social interactions may compel biracial children to classify themselves within racial labels; I believe that my first grade encounter was the starting point of classification in my life. In defending my relationship to my mother, I had become aware of race and identification.

Scene 2

Later in my life, the roles would be reversed. My daughter would have to defend her relationship to me because of skin color issues. As early as kindergarten, my fair-skinned daughter, Bethany, would talk proudly about her Mexican heritage only to have classmates quickly negate her statements. Despite the fact that we both have freckles sprinkled across our noses and see through almond-shaped eyes, the connections are not readily seen between my daughter and me. My relationship to Bethany has been readily denied by outsiders and, sadly, dismissed even by family.

Omigosh, she's a mayonnaise baby!

Ouch. *Yeah, she's pretty fair-skinned.*

She's so pale.

Defensively. *She looks like her daddy and both of our mothers.*

Yeah, but she's so….so white!

Although I never confronted the comments made by a family member, I felt the sting of the words that injured my heart. I had to defend yet another precious relationship. Somehow, the light skin gene had skipped a generation; however, the cross was not mine alone to bear. My daughter would feel the sting of barbed comments from peers; she shared one of many painful events in her video interview (Bruner & Poplin, interview audio file, 2013):

> *When I was in high school, my granddaddy Timo came to one of my cross country meets. And I had friends that came up to me and asked me why I was talking to him. I respected him because he was a great runner. My dad was a good runner and then, I ran. So, I wasn't the best runner but I still liked running. But I was talking to him and he was very dark-skinned, you know. And my friends came up to me and were like, "Who was that guy you were talking with?" Like, you know, "Who was that Mexican guy?" A couple of them thought he was Black, you know. So I was just, like, "That's my grandfather." And they were, like, "No way! That's not your grandfather." And I was, like, "Yeah, that's my grandfather." And, you know, it was just challenging because you're always having to explain yourself. It's exhausting.*

During my daughter's interview, it became apparent that she was frustrated by the struggles that arose due to skin color difference; she continuously referred to them as "challenging" (Bruner & Poplin, interview audio file, 2013). As I heard the words spilled out of my daughter's mouth with emphasis and exasperation, I realized that she was working through her multiracial identity as well. Even though her outward appearance would make her appear White to the world around her, inside Bethany's heart, she is decidedly Mexican. Her mother is half Mexican, her grandfather is Mexican, and she wants to be connected to both of us. She is consistently frustrated by conversations that refute her connection to family. I ached as I listened to Bethany's interview because, as a parent, I wanted to protect my child.

Reflections on Act 1, Scene 2

Even though so many changes have taken place in our world in the decades that separate my upbringing from my daughter's, the need to sort people into racial categories has not changed despite the range of categories now available. I heard the voices of the scholars that I had read through this journey echoing the sentiments that my daughter and I shared; the multiracial person will struggle with self-perception and perceptions of others when their group membership is challenged by others resulting in identity denial (Townsend, Markus, and Bergsieker, 2009). My thoughts rushed to conversations in movies and those of my own grandfather with my mother when biracial couples are told that they need to think about what their children will go through in this world. There is a struggle and it is an identity crisis. Within Bethany's identity crisis, a unique viewpoint of the world can and should be unpacked. Just as her friends ignored her relationship to her dark grandfather and emphasized her Whiteness, many people overlook what Brackett et

al (2006) highlighted as particularly valuable within multiracials. Multiracial individuals "have a unique vantage point from which to comment on race in our society and as such their voices should not be squelched. Thus, researchers should pay attention to the ways in which persons claiming a multiracial identity experience social interactions differently than persons who fit neatly into a long-standing racial category. Multiracial experiences provide a unique outlook on the continuing saga of race relations in the U.S." (p. 443). Although my initial response to the experiences that my daughter and I have encountered in our respective multiracial identity development journeys is sadness, what can be learned and shared provides meaning and significance; it is the very reason that this study had to be done.

ACT TWO: Yo' daddy's a Mexican so You be a Mexican!

Scene 1

During my childhood, I rarely confronted questions about my race or ethnicity. My father was a military man and we spent a great deal of my childhood stationed at air force bases with schools filled with mixed-race children. My time in the South, particularly Georgia, was when I dealt with identity questions. As I look back on the places where we lived, I understand why the questions rarely came up. I lived in the Philippines and Japan; I have been told on numerous occasions that I look Asian. No questions asked. We lived in South Dakota with a large American Indian population. I had long black coarse hair and a stocky build. No questions asked. At the age of fourteen, we returned to Valdosta, Georgia. Although South Georgia has a large contingency of Mexicans now due to migrant farm workers, my high school was predominantly Black.

Girl, you be Chinese?

What?

You be Chinese?

No.

Then what you be?

Sarcastically. *I be a human.*

You know what I mean? What you BE?

My father is Mexican and…

Oh, you be Mexican. Yo' daddy's a Mexican so You be a Mexican!

The decision had been made. I was Mexican. Why fight it? I began to embrace my heritage. I did not purposefully deny my connection to my mother. In fact, I think I thought of her as Mexican because she embraced my father's culture. She cooked Mexican food for our family and it rivaled my *abuelita's* cooking. We were a Mexican family. In high school, I began to study Spanish. I wanted to know the language of "my people". I wanted to communicate with my family members. I worked at an orphanage in Mexico after my sophomore year of high school; I honed my language skills while laying bricks to build a dormitory for an orphanage. I have often wondered if I pursued Spanish to get in touch with my Mexican roots or to earn my father's acceptance and approval. Whatever the reason, I was content to be known as Mexican. As a teenager, I made fashion choices that reflected my heritage alignment. I wore peasant blouses with Mexican embroidery. I wore my hair in braids. My skirts were colorful, and many of them came from Mexico. As I look back, my choices were actually in style; I wore garments that reflected the fashionable hippie look of the sixties that flowed into the seventies. I took my fashion choices one step too far.

I am not certain how I learned that the word "spic" was a nickname used for Mexicans, but I heard it somewhere. I decided to take a t-shirt and emblazon it with the word "SPIC" in large letters, written in glue and covered in glitter. I proudly wore my "SPIC" shirt to school and church activities. Not only did I wear this shirt throughout high school, I took it to college. I have a picture of myself wearing my beloved shirt in an intramural basketball team picture. As an adult, I want to ask: Why did no one say anything to me about this shirt? Why didn't my parents stop me? Why didn't my teachers or pastor say something to me? This word can a highly offensive word to some; yet, I wore it with pride and no one said anything. Why? Why??? WHY????? I am so angry and wounded. Did they think that I was just being a teenager, and that I would outgrow my rebellious need to malign myself and other Hispanics? Did they have a pure motive? How could they? My frustration over this particular event in my life has changed me. As a teacher, I feel compelled to intervene with students when I hear them say things or see them wear clothing that presents a negative image of self. I do not want my students asking themselves if someone cared enough about them to speak the truth.

Reflections on Act 2, Scene 1

The intensity of emotion that I experienced as an adult related to my "spic" t-shirt was jarring to me. In one sense, I had taken control over my own identity development. As an adolescent, I had chosen how I would present myself to others by altering a garment so that it would serve to definitively place a racial label on me. On the other hand, the label that I chose was inherently derogatory. Some theorists would assert that I had employed my Whiteness by choosing to name myself rather than receive a societal label (Burke & Kao, 2013). Additionally, choosing an ethnic reference, regardless of its

derogatory nature, placed me within a colorblind posture of an enlightened White person who has transcended race. As I stared at the picture of me with my shirt in the middle of a predominantly White group of basketball players, I was disturbed by the reality that I could not avoid; the picture served physical evidence of a significant social event in my life. I read and re-read the visual text; with each reading, new meaning evolved. My desire to fit in with my peers and my need for acceptance prompted me to label myself before others could do so. There were few Latinos/as at the private women's college that I attended; I had little choice but to work within the setting in which I found myself. Although I do not recall experiencing racism from my classmates, I never felt completely accepted. I had always attributed my outsider feelings to my socioeconomic status; it is in the reflective backwards glance that I understand my choice to represent myself. Viewing a racial epithet as insignificant because of a perceived absence of racism aligned me with my Whiteness (Gallagher, 2003). Gallagher (2003) shared that clothing tied to specific ethnic groups have become items that everyone can purchase regardless of race; in fact, "it is through such acts of shared consumption that race becomes nothing more than an innocuous cultural signifier" (p. 5). During high school and college, much of my wardrobe included clothing that embraced my Mexican roots; my White side was demonstrating power over self-definition and identity development.

As an adolescent multiracial, however, according to Poston's (1990) model, I had moved into the group categorization stage where the biracial individual feels "pushed to choose an identity, usually of one ethnic group" (p. 95). According to Rockquemore (1999), biracial individuals often ascribe to traditional racial categories to avoid questions prompted by physical appearance. In high school, I chose a traditional racial category; I

embraced being Hispanic. Perhaps I decided to be Mexican to sidestep the "What are you?" question or perhaps I saw the advantages of being named Hispanic for academic purposes of college and scholarships. Regardless, I was viewed as, and I viewed myself as, a Mexican.

Scene 2

I speak three languages. I speak English, Spanish, and French. Language learning has always been easy for me. I wished that I had applied myself more to the languages I chose to learn. As a high school student, I began my study of Spanish. I had my first opportunity to try out my newly-acquired language skills during a visit to Texas in December, 1973. My *"abuelita"* (Spanish for *"little grandmother"*) did not speak English. As a child, she came to care for my family several times. She took a bus to Lubbock, Texas, when my sister was born to help my parents with their two small children and newborn. My mother tells stories of refried beans in bottles and my first haircut under my *abuelita's* care. Grandma Porfiria also took a bus to New York when my mother was recovering from a shattered leg that had been trapped under a piano she tried to move. Her trip to New York was more memorable to me because I was in the fourth grade at the time. She communicated with us through gestures and the one word that she knew in English – *eggs*. We ate a lot of eggs during my grandmother's visit.

Porfiria Castro was an imposing figure although she only measured four foot, nine inches. My diminutive grandmother was terrifying because she pointed at us with her index nub when she scolded us with a barrage of Spanish. My *abuelita* lost her index finger due to a sewing injury which turned to gangrene because she went to witch doctors instead of medical doctors when a needle was lodged in her finger. I was at the receiving

end of a "nub scolding" that December afternoon when I first tried to communicate with my grandmother in Spanish. The conversation began harmlessly enough. I shared what was going on with friends and family, using familiar vocabulary and grammar with ease. I wanted to tell her about an embarrassing situation with a boy so I did what any American child would do; I created a cognate that ended with an "o". Actually, I used an "a" because I knew that I was a girl so I would have to use a feminine adjective.

> *¡Ay, abuelita! ¡Yo estaba tan embarazada!* (I searched her face for pride at my use of her language; instead, she began to shake her nub furiously at me.)
>
> *¡Niña! ¡Qué tú no eras cristiana cuando hiciste esto!* (A barrage of angry Spanish words)
>
> I burst into tears.
>
> More angry words in Spanish.
>
> More tears.
>
> [My parents return.]
>
> *Timo, ¿qué pasó?* (A bombardment of questions in Spanish)
>
> *Marie, what in the world you tell your grandmother you're pregnant?*
>
> *Pregnant? Omigosh, daddy, no! I told her I was "embarazada".*
>
> *That's how you say pregnant in Spanish. What were you thinking?* (More angry words, a combination of English and Spanish)
>
> *But, daddy! I didn't know.*
>
> *What in the world kind of Spanish are they teaching you?*
>
> (Sniff.) Why didn't you teach me Spanish? (Thought, not spoken)

I didn't dare tell my father what I was thinking. I just stood there, paralyzed by fear and frustration. Any confidence I had in my language skills faded in that moment. In my mind, I was just a *gringa* who knew a few words in Spanish. My Mexican cousins were bilingual and negotiated easily between the two languages. I felt twinges of jealousy and sadness because I wanted to find favor with my father and with my grandmother. More than anything, I wanted my Mexican family to see me as one of them. I wanted to be Mexican with the Mexicans.

Reflections on Act 2, Scene2

One of the major factors that influence self-identification for Latinos/as is language (Stokes-Brown, 2012). Additionally, language can be a devaluing social performance since it is ethnically attributed to those of immigrant status (Yosso, 2005). During this stage of my life, I was crossing borders within Roots' (1996) biracial models; as a teenager, I was living within "a situational identity, or shifting racial identity with regard to context or environment; claiming an independent multiracial reference point apart from family and peers; and maintaining a monoracial identity when entering different cultural environments" (p. 508). As stated above, I wanted to be Mexican with the Mexicans; I wanted my monoracial identity. I was fully aware of my multiracial status, yet I allowed context and environment determine my racial perception as White or Mexican. I did, however, have choices, and I began to exercise them during this time. I employed my Spanish language skills, feeble as they were, to attempt to be Mexican when I was with my Mexican family.

LatCrit Theory addresses issues related to how language impacts acceptance and rejection within various cultural and societal contexts (Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005;

Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). Within the Hispanic community, identity and language are inextricably tied; speaking Spanish reveals connection and ethnic pride. One of the principal reasons that LatCrit Theory focuses on language is due to its importance in Latino/a identity as well as its potential to elicit racism and forms of subordination (Villalpando, 2004). Language serves to connect and to isolate; for me, it was a source of alienation due to my inability to communicate in Spanish with a high level of proficiency. Within my Mexican family, the ability to navigate the Spanish language was a measuring stick for inclusion or exclusion; as much as I wanted to connect with them, language presented communication issues that resulted in isolation. My assertion is not that my family intentionally rejected me; I simply believe that language impacted acceptance.

As I reflect on my desire to be perceived as Mexican, I agree with Gallagher (2003) who asserted that multiracials have a luxury that monoracials (or those who believe themselves to be monoracial since the construct as a truth probably does not exist) in that flexibility in identity choices are not only permissible, but the norm for most. I had the liberty of choice, and could perceive myself as Mexican due to the latitude afforded within my multiracial identity. Not every Latino/a can decide to be or not to be; as a multiracial person, I can float in and out of a Hispanic identity simply by choosing to do so. In some ways, being multiracial is much like being privileged as White. Although I felt a frustration at not feeling accepted by my Mexican family, I still had a choice to allow absence of acceptance to identify me. According to LatCrit Theory, Latinos/as are those who have been oppressed by the predominately White system based upon race, language, and citizenship status (Bernal, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Aoki & Johnson, 2009; Quiñones et al, 2011). I was not, nor am I currently, shackled by my

racial identity. Is it because of my ability to check a box that says that I am multiracial? Or is it because, as a multiracial, I am able to move in and out of identities of my choosing? In either case, I have a choice and choice is power.

ACT THREE: White Like Me?

Scene 1

I have always said that I attended Agnes Scott College by the grace of God and the possession of scholarships, scholarships that came my way because of the Hispanic box that I readily checked on applications and standardized testing. With a surname of Castro and bronzed skin, no one could deny my minority status. But in college, there were those who tried to make sense of my heritage:

Your dad's Mexican?

Yes.

Do you speak Spanish?

I used to.

You don't really look Mexican either.

That's a first.

And you don't act Mexican.

What do you mean?

You know.

No, I didn't know. My mind would race through all the familiar stereotypes. Was I supposed to be sleeping against a cactus? Filling a van with fifteen other friends or family members? Eating tacos and refried beans? Perhaps, I wasn't acting Mexican because I had begun to act White. I wanted to fit in to my new surroundings. My parents

could not afford for me to fit in, but my mother was creative. She would purchase sweaters at Kmart and have them monogrammed; I wore designer clothing purchased from thrift stores or made by my mother. During my freshman year of college, I invited a friend to come home with me for the weekend. Her affluent family lived in a mansion in one of the Carolinas and my home was a three bedroom, one bathroom brick home that had less than a thousand square feet. Although she was gracious, I sensed that she learned my true identity. She met my Mexican father. She stayed in my simple home. She knew that I was a scholarship student. For the next four years, I did everything I could to never be completely discovered; primarily, I separated home from school. I did not invite my father to the father-daughter dances. I was in several plays, and I never mentioned them to my parents. Agnes Scott is private women's college, full of tradition and ceremony; there were many things that I did not attend during my college years because I considered them to be events above my station in life. I did not want to believe that I was ashamed of my family. I told myself that I was simply saving my parents the expense of traveling from Valdosta to Decatur since our funds were limited. During my college years, the gap was widening between my parents; divorce seemed imminent. I spent my summers away from home so that I could avoid the chaos and anger. I had become adept at believing that if I did not witness something firsthand then it was not happening.

Reflections on Act 3, Scene 1

My multiracial identity shifted at the end of my adolescence when I chose to attend a predominantly White women's college. Although I had used the Hispanic label to my financial advantage to get into college, I made several decisions during my collegiate years that aligned me more with my White side. Multiracial scholars agree that

most multiracials move fluidly through various racial identities within a lifetime, and the multiracial identity is a flexible concept that changes within various social contexts throughout one's lifetime (Jeffries, 2012). In my life, I have moved from a Hispanic identity to a White identity to a border mentality that holds both identities as one; I have even experienced the transcendent identity that Rockquemore (1999) explained as one that negates race as a significant factor in life. According to Poston's (1990) model, I had entered the enmeshment/denial stage which "is characterized by confusion and guilt at having to choose one identity that is not fully expressive of one's background" (p. 154). Both Rockquemore's and Poston's models consider a stage characterized by denial, whether it is rejection of race as a construct or disavowal of one's parent; it is at this stage, according to Poston (1990) that one often experience "guilt, self-hatred, and lack of acceptance from one or more groups" (p. 154). Additionally, Poston (1990) asserted that a biracial person in this stage may avoid having friends meet the parent whose racial background does not fit the mold that they desire for self during this time. Although I did not feel the emotions that Poston attributes to this stage in multiracial identity development while I was in the stage, I look back on it with guilt and shame. I cannot, however, stay within a place of self-loathing because it would serve no beneficial purpose for me or for society. I choose, instead, to share my story so that others can understand the posture that young multiracial adults may take when dealing with choices related to racial identity. I often wonder how my choices would have been different had I had a counselor who had helped me understand my positioning, and who encouraged me to embrace my multiracial background and identity.

Scene 2

During my senior year of college, my life changed dramatically. I met the young man who would become my husband. During our first date, we talked about family:

My family is poor.

My father works in a factory.

My father was twenty-one and my mother was fifteen when they married.

My mother had me at sixteen years old.

My parents are struggling in their marriage.

My parents are divorced; my dad's on wife number four.

My father is Mexican.

My first girlfriend was Black.

Not only did we share our Christian faith in common, we had lived through many similar circumstances; we understood each other. My husband, Ken, has ancestors from Germany and Ireland. He can trace his roots back to 1527 to Switzerland. There is a significant skin tone difference, and it has made a difference in my relationship to his family. Ken has a ruddy complexion and green eyes that readily connect him to his Irish heritage. I imagined that our children would have my tan skin and his green eyes, but one came out looking like him and the other is my masculine twin. In our little home, we have often teased that people would think that we are divorcees with children from previous marriages. We rarely interacted with Ken's family because of distance and finances; they lived in Illinois and we lived in Georgia. Occasionally, we would spend time with his parents and siblings. These encounters were awkward for me. My family tells me that I take a stern posture and make a certain face when I am hurt or disgusted by

something said or done. It has come to my attention that I cannot help this physical reaction, but that it is so severe that others are immediately affronted by it. I remember a day when I know that I made "the face".

My memories are vivid when it comes to a particular event that surprised me; my sweet husband was the cause of my discomfort when he chose to talk his grandmother about my race:

> *Grandma, were you surprised when I married a Mexican?* (Ken's grandmother glared at him. She was hooked up to a respirator, and could barely engage in conversations.)
>
> *Grandma, did it bother you?* ("Yes," said her eyes.)
>
> *Does it bother you that Marie is Mexican?* (How about does it bother Marie that you're talking about her being Mexican? I wanted to scream.)

My husband is well-known for his thoughtfulness. I have always considered him to be the kindest person that I know. Ken's conversation with his dying grandmother devastated me. Ken had told me that his grandmother struggled with prejudice, and that she was probably not in favor of our union. What compelled him to ask his grandmother about her feelings about my race? She was physically incapable of speaking, but her non-verbal communication spoke volumes. I perceived her reaction as disappointment that her first grandchild decided to marry beneath him. My face registered my thoughts. I was angry. I was disgusted. I was sad. I was hurt. Later, when Ken and I talked about the conversation, he was saddened by his actions that caused my pain. I try to be careful about my own words as a result of receiving painful barbs, but I have also uttered my fair share at the expense of others:

We're the brown people and they're the White people. (My son and I nod towards my husband and daughter sitting across from us in a restaurant booth).

Brown people like to be on time!

White people are late.

Brown people are driven.

White people are easy-going and laid back.

Brown people are task-oriented.

White people care about others.

You know, I'm pretty sure anyone looking at this table would think that we're divorcees with children from previous marriages.

Yeah, no one would think we are the parents of both of these children.

I am no longer a child who needs guidance from adults; I am the adult providing guidance for my children. It is difficult for me to forgive myself for highlighting the differences between my daughter and me by focusing on the skin color issues that we experienced as a family. The aforementioned conversation did not take place only once, like the conversation with Ken's grandmother. We had the *Brown People versus White People* conversation on numerous occasions. Not only did I highlight skin color differences, I put down White people and elevated Brown people. Perhaps I was participating in reverse discrimination; once again, I am overwhelmed with shame and frustration about my inability to change my past actions. I cannot recreate the childhood experiences that shaped my multiracial identity any more than I can go back in time and change the ones that I allowed and imposed upon my own children. My helplessness, at times, devastates me and, at other times, motivates me to change. The constant need to

validate myself, however, is consistent with unremitting social interactions that beg me to identify myself racially. At what point will I no longer feel the need to answer questions about my race? I feel that I will spend the rest of my life reassuring others of my connections to both my mother and my daughter. Perhaps I will even have to defend other precious ties.

Soon I will be a grandmother. What will my grandson's identity be? What will my contribution be to the shaping of his connection to me? My son married a fair-skinned beauty who may produce a light colored son offspring. Will I have to defend my connection to him? Will people doubt that I am his grandmother? Just because my son has dark skin does not safeguard that his offspring will be tan as well. At what point in our genealogy will skin color cease to play a role in connection? As a family, we have discussed my title as a grandmother. Everyone, including me, wants to include my Mexican heritage in my nickname; the concept of naming comes into play. I would rather be called "lita" before I being designated a "memaw". With respect to terms of endearment within my respective racial backgrounds, once again, my Latino/a identity trumps my Southern White roots. I continue to ask myself why. My journey to multiracial identity development is a work in progress. Although I am discovering what being multiracial means to me, I believe that I will continue to gain understanding as years go by, and society evolves.

Reflections on Act 3, Scene 2

As an adult, I had moved into the stage of multiracial identity that Poston (1990) called the appreciation stage. According to Poston (1990), this stage reveals an appreciation of a multiple identity and a broadening of group referencing; however, there

is a tendency to continue identification with one particular racial/ethnic heritage and culture over the other. I am well-aware of my multiracial status. I have previously mentioned that I am continuing to uncover the power that has come with realizing that my status includes choices that monoracials, particularly those from my Latino/a roots, do not experience. Despite the inequities that exist for Latinos/as, particularly in today's culture, I still consider myself more Latino/a than White. I believe that my choice to look at the data within this study through LatCrit Theory reveals my self-identification as Hispanic even though my emotions still cringe at a choice that may exclude my precious ties with my mother and daughter. I continue to feel conflicted at a monoracial identification, yet I enjoy the cultural richness that is my Latino/a heritage.

Whether it is choosing my grandmother nickname or decorating my home, I defer to the Latino/a side of me. Perhaps, I have simply chosen the path of least resistance as Jeffries' (2012) believed Obama did; he chose to be Black because it was easier than defending his Whiteness. Or have I entered into complete appreciation for the side of me that is viewed as less valuable in today's world? Am I in the transcendent state that Rockquemore's (1999) outlined as denying race as a factor? When I negate race as a factor, I think of Gallagher's (2003) study which asserts that the colorblind mentality is one that denies racism and continues to privilege Whites. The argument begins to feel circular to me, causing me extreme inner turmoil. I begin to ask myself: has this study served to enlighten me or am still struggling with negating the impact of race and racial ascription in my life? Again, I have choice. I choose to believe that my choice of embracing my Mexican roots while not denying my White heritage is an amenity that I enjoy as a multiracial person.

LatCrit Theory attends to the impact of race and racism as factors by which individuals are sorted and measured in this world; it is the first of five tenets adopted from CRT. In Yosso's and Solórzano's (2005) outline of LatCrit's tenets, not only is there a focus on the intercentricity of race and racism, there is a commitment to social justice and the centrality of experiential knowledge. LatCrit theory applies directly to my study since it empowers the knowledge that I have gained through my experiences related to race, and to my study's desire to promote change. My experiences in focusing on my Mexican heritage, living as with a monoracial identity, informed my developing multiracial identity. What I learned, and continue to learn, is that a monoracial stance places me within contexts that affect the Latino/a population, such as language, immigration, culture, ethnicity, identity, phenotype, accent, and surname (Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tate, 1997; Valdes, 1997; Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005).

By choosing to be viewed as Mexican, I place myself within a racial location with potential to experience the alienation that Latinos/as have endured. The current hostile state of fear, anxiety, and hostility directed towards Mexicans, with most being considered of illegal immigrant status (Michalowski, 2013) is not a position that I have directly endured. I have not nor will I ever fully experience the subordination and alienation that Latinos/as have endured since I am not fully Latino/a. I am both saddened and heartened by that statement; my emotions mirror the duality that I continue to live out.

ACT FOUR: ¡Yo hablo español, y'all!

Scene 1

Although I have discussed the impact of learning the Spanish language within family settings, my ability to communicate in my father's native language has impacted the development of my multiracial identity. I studied Spanish in high school and French in college. Shortly after graduation, I was a newly married woman with two small children who stayed at home with toddlers. When my children were ready to enter school, I was approached by the principal of the high school in the South Georgia town in which we had settled.

Marie, I need a Spanish teacher.

I don't really speak Spanish anymore.

You look like you speak Spanish.

I took three and half years of college French.

But you speak Spanish, right?

I used to; I haven't had any Spanish classes since high school.

Come by and talk to me about the position.

Teaching high school Spanish was an adolescent dream revived. I had attended the Governor's Honors Program in Spanish. I was the president of the Spanish Club. I was Who's Who Among High School Spanish Students. I knew Spanish, but not anymore. When I began college, I switched languages and never looked back. I remembered so little Spanish that I could not imagine teaching it. But, I *looked* like I could speak and teach Spanish. I decided to pursue the job. The principal won me over when he told me that I could start a Drama Club, but I still did not have the necessary

college hours nor did I have a degree in Education. I enrolled in two colleges that summer, and took twenty hours of Spanish at each. I became a Spanish teacher.

My first year of teaching was a nightmare and beautiful dream, all at once. I was coaching the one-act play team and directing musicals. Yet, I had to compile lesson plans and go through a process entitled the Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument – a process that was discarded the very next year. It was grueling. The most difficult thing about teaching Spanish was the presence of Native Spanish speakers in my class. I still shudder with embarrassment at my lack of classroom management skills and my inability to communicate well in Spanish.

Hey man, shee's cussing at you!

José, what did you say?

Notheeng. I was just saying you're a really good Spanish teacher.

(laughter)

Seriously, man, shee's saying bad stuff about you!

Señora Bruner, José says you're talking trash about us in Spanish.

Not only did José do everything he could to keep me off task, his face contorted with every Spanish sentence and grammar explanation I produced. He would argue with me. He would tell me that I didn't know what I was talking about. He was right. I didn't know what I was doing. I decided to throw myself into the pursuit of the Spanish language again. I worked towards a Master's degree in Spanish Education. I was trained in classroom management and the Spanish language, or was I? Graduate school was reminiscent of high school; my mimicry skills allowed me to feign proficiency. There was so much that I still did not understand about the intricacies of grammar that I was too

proud to ask. I felt like a phony, but in the rural town where I taught, no one knew…except for the Native Speakers.

My husband and I decided to return to the Atlanta area when our children were ready to enter high school. We wanted to move to a community where our children would have more academic and athletic opportunities so we moved to suburban Atlanta. Rather than being one of two Spanish teachers, I became one of seven. I began to teach in a school where the teachers spoke to each other in Spanish during breaks and at lunch. Mostly, I listened. There were far too many Native Speakers around who would discover my inability to navigate the Spanish language. I sensed their disapproving looks when I failed to choose the correct verb tense or when I didn't know the necessary vocabulary word. But I still *looked* like I should be able to speak and teach Spanish. Not only do I continue to deal with Native Speakers in my classrooms who continue to correct me, I have parent/teacher conferences with parents who are from Spanish-speaking countries. I don't *feel* like a Spanish teacher. I *feel* like a woman whose father is Mexican who did not teacher her Spanish, but gave her the genetics to *look* like she speaks it.

Reflections on Act 4, Scene 1

One of the principal issues of LatCrit Theory deals with language preservation, first-language preservation. There is an aspect of maintaining historical connections through language; many Latinos/as consider assimilation to an English-only context a traumatic loss both emotionally and culturally (Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Valdes, 1997; Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005). When I encounter Native Speakers, I understand the cultural connection that exists within language and identity; I long for that connection. I also know that learning a second-language during and/or post-puberty results in the

retention of a native language accent. Since I began my language studies in high school, it is highly unlikely that I will ever sound like a Native Speaker. As a result, my Latino/a identity will probably never be as salient as I would want it to be with the Hispanic community. Although my physical appearance may align me with my Mexican roots, it is the hint of an American accent in my Spanish that will prohibit my complete acceptance as a Latino/a. I have certainly sensed a denial of access into the Hispanic community; I am regarded as an American who is attempting to use their language, with more skill than most. I have dear friends who are full-blooded Latinos/as who have articulated that they are impressed with my language skills, but can definitely tell that I am a *gringa.* Whereas LatCrit Theory recognizes the impact of language on inclusion and exclusion for Latinos/as (Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005), I contend that multiracials with Latino/a heritage experience acceptance and rejection due to their inability to communicate proficiently in Spanish.

With respect to identity development, I am entering a new stage in Poston's (1990) model. I have come to the place where I am able to integrate my dual identities. I value my Mexican heritage, and have incorporated it into a multicultural existence that provides a more "secure, integrated identity" (Poston, 1990, p. 154). Poston's (1990) work was geared towards counselors who were dealing with identity-related mental health issues expressed by multiracial patients. The purpose of Poston's (1990) model was to provide a framework that culminates in healthy mental state of integration. I believe that my foray into this study provided necessary resolution for insecure emotions, resulting in an ability to view the social interactions of my life through mature eyes. As an adult, I can evaluate past injuries and work through emotions in a productive manner.

Using autoethnography as the methodology for this study was essential since it provided ways of making meaning that are intensely personal as well as connected autobiography with culture and society (Ellis, 2004). I believe that I entered the state of integration during this study due to the understanding and insight gained during the reflective and analytical process.

Scene 2

Not only have I struggled with my acquisition and proficiency with respect to speaking Spanish, I committed the same sin that my father did. I did not teach my children Spanish at home. I regretted not growing up bilingual. I continue to struggle with jealousy when I hear small children weaving in and out of both languages with ease as they serve as translators during their own parent/teacher conferences. And yet, I did not endeavor to give my children what I had longed for in my own life. Perhaps it was my overwhelming sense of inadequacy as a Spanish speaker or perhaps it was because their father is not a Spanish speaker, I made excuses. I did not realize how much it meant until I conducted an interview with my daughter (Bruner & Bruner, interview audio file, 2013). She stated:

> *My first study abroad was to Mexico and my second was to Argentina, both were Spanish-speaking countries. So, I really desired to learn. I wanted to be immersed as much as possible. I wanted to hang out with Mexicans. When I was there, I didn't want to spend time with the people that were just on my study-abroad trip, but more so with the people who were from that country. Argentina, not so much. I didn't feel as connected in Argentina, but I felt very connected in Mexico. I wanted to go out dancing all the time, go and try all the different restaurants,*

> *study the language as much as I could…communicate; I loved my house mother. She was a really great person, even though my mom was really jealous of her (wink). She didn't speak any English so I learned a lot from her, just going back and speaking and communicating with her what I wanted for food and going places and doing things like that. So, yeah, I learned the language that way. It has not come easily to me. It's not a natural gifting for me and so, that has been very upsetting. Especially, I know you're not supposed to compare but I do, my brother is actually really good at it. He's able to get it and he actually majored in Spanish. So, for me, that has been really hard because it's like I wanted it so badly, but it just didn't come naturally to me. And so, even though I can get around and can understand decently well, I am by no means fluent. I had that desire, but it just did not come easily to me. It was very stressful. (pause) It's still stressful.*

As I listened intently to Bethany, I watched her face register the frustration and sadness that she was articulating over not being able to communicate in the language of her ancestors. Although her interview included aspects about our physical appearances and their impact on our connection, this section of her interview served as a reminder about her frustration over her inability to speak Spanish. Her use of the word "connection" resonated with me; for her, and for me, the inability to be connected to someone significant in your life provides ambiguity in identity development. For my daughter Bethany, language was a major cause of stress for her; her words echoed my sentiments related to proficiency in Spanish. After the interview, she shared with me that she wished that I had taught her Spanish as a child so that no one would ever doubt her Mexican

heritage. Language could have served as the adhesive to bind us together. Even with her fair complexion, she could "pass" for Hispanic if she were fluent. Bethany wanted there to be no doubt about her ethnic/racial heritage; for her, the Spanish language was the key.

Reflections on Act 4, Scene 2

Language proficiency, or the lack thereof, has played a role in racial ascription for many multiracial individuals (Bernstein & De La Cruz, 2008; Cheng & Lee, 2009; Vasquez, 2010). As previously mentioned, language is a marker for those who initiated LatCrit Theory wherein authors asserted that society's widespread racism impacts primarily with respect to language and citizenship. In fact, LatCrit Theory evolved primarily for concerns related to these issues, later enveloping other evidences of racism impacting Latinos/as (D'Avila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010). One of the most important features of autoethnography is the highly personalized accounts shared within the study; the personal nature of the storytelling is also what makes autoethnography so incredibly difficult. Rather than narcissistic navel-gazing, I found myself continuously undergoing brutal self-examination that exhausted me. Just as I was unable to control circumstances in my upbringing, I am incapable of changing the decisions that I made with my daughter during her developmental years. Likewise, I understand that the Spanish that I was able to teach her is not comparable to that which my father could have taught my siblings and me. In any case, language is inextricably tied to her identity and her connection with me. Although she did not reveal the depth of her discouragement concerning her Spanish skills during her interview, Bethany has often shared with me that she no longer wants to even attempt to speak in Spanish. When she disavows her Spanish skills, I take it personally. I try not to, but it feels personal. I held the key to early language study for her,

and I did not use it. She resents not knowing Spanish. It is difficult for me not to personalize her struggle, yet I find myself moving into a place of understanding that I completely attribute to my inward incursion. In my autoethnography, I had engaged in storytelling that included "passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433). With respect to language, both Bethany and I had experienced loss; sharing our stories provided narratives that reflect the goal of autoethnography. Ellis and Bochner (2006) asserted that "autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. It needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate. Intimacy is a way of being, a mode of caring, and it shouldn't be used as a vehicle to produce distanced theorizing" (p. 433). By allowing myself to share that which has been personal as well as feel the emotions intensely, I immersed myself in the autoethnography experience. My hope is that the narratives produced create understanding regarding multiracial identity development as well as promote the valuable nature that resides within autoethnography as an approach to research. The connections to theory within these pages and, on my website, reflect my willingness to be vulnerable and intimate. This study was much like the painful process of childbirth, laboring intensely in order to bring something meaningful into the world.

ACT FIVE: My mother's daughter and "la hija de mi papá"

Scene 1

During my parents' respective interviews, each of them expressed that they viewed me as a descendent of their respective races. My father called me "Hispanic, [and after hesitating], well, mixed with Anglo" (Bruner & T. Castro, interview audio file,

2013). My mother declared that she "could only think of [me] as being White, more [her] than anybody else" (Bruner & D. Castro, interview audio file, 2013). I am unsure if the distinctions that they made are due to the conflicts resulting in divorce or if they consider me aligned with their race due to the connection between us. Regardless, they think of me as belonging to their separate races rather than a combination of the two. During recent encounters with my extended family, I believe that their respective families feel the same way:

You're going to be a doctor?

Well, not a medical one.

Honey, I understand that. You're getting your PhD, right?

Right.

And you've got to write a book, right?

Something like that.

Whatcha' writin' 'bout?

I'm writing about growing up as a multiracial child.

What?!?!? You're not multiracial.

(An exchange of glances between my sister and me)

Well, Daddy's Mexican and Mama's White so…

So what? You're not biracial!

How else would you explain it?

You're your mama's child and your daddy's child, but you're not biracial.

You're right, I'm multiracial. Don't forget that we have Indian blood in us as well.

Yeah, I remember when Daddy used to tease about Timo being a Blackfoot Indian because he was so dark. (Uncomfortable pause)

We were celebrating my mother's seventieth birthday, and her siblings were present at the party. My sister, daughter, and I talked later about how amusing it was that everyone was so adamant that we were not biracial. It was probably because they had always heard the term in the context of mixing Black and White races. They considered my mother's marriage to my father less offensive than a mixture of Black and White. My White family has a history of prejudice; after all, my grandfather's name is Stonewall Jackson Horton. They represent a long line of Southerners who take pride in their Rebel relatives from the Civil War. There was no way that the niece that they loved was biracial; it just was not so. As I listened to my mother's interview when she recounted the Chocolate Boy story, she said that she wondered if I "was practicing being prejudiced" (Bruner & D. Castro, interview audio file, 2013). My mother is very self-conscious about prejudicial behavior because all of my siblings and I have accused her of making racist comments; however, she is insistent that she is not prejudice. I honestly believe that racism was simply part of her upbringing, and it is deeply ingrained in her. I think that she is incapable of making the distinction because she does not want to believe that anything that her parents taught her is unkind or wrong.

Reflections on Act 5, Scene 1

Sanchez, Shih, and Garcia (2009) concluded their study on multiracial identity juggling by promoting an integrated identity because interpretation of their findings could mean that "people who consistently value one identity over another (e.g., Latino/White participants who always value being Latino over being White) show lower psychological

well-being" (p. 253). My resolution to operating in an integrated multiracial identity is obviously the psychologically healthy choice (Poston, 1990; Sanchez, Shih, & Garcia, 2009). My conversation with my Southern White family reaffirmed the need to accept my family members where they are and where they have been, aligning myself with them in the ways that I can. Although we may not share the same viewpoints on my heritage, my choice to integrate both my Southern White roots with my border town Mexican roots places me within what I consider to be the most evolved identity to which a multiracial individual can aspire. Although Poston (1990) and Sanchez, Shih, and Garcia (2009) do not categorically value one identity over another, they have presented findings of psychological well-being among those who exhibit integrated multiracial identities. I am content with being psychologically healthy as a result of participating in my study.

Scene 2

My father, on the other hand, is extremely proud of his Mexican heritage. Although he is an American citizen, he considers himself to be Mexican. He considers his children to be Mexican as well; however, he will assent to an insignificant addition of Anglo blood running through our veins. Our White heritage is minimal in his mind; his children are Hispanic. I am Hispanic. I am the most Hispanic because I speak his language. During the Spring and Summer of 2013, my husband and I took care of my father and his move back to Texas. There were several journal entries related to the detour I was taking with my father because my personal life had superseded my academic pursuits. There was no question in my mind what I had to do: I needed to take care of my father. What began as a daughter's duty became a blessing to my study; I was able to view family encounters and relationships as an adult purposefully evaluating multiracial

identity development. The road trip to Texas was transformative in my life. I found myself in perpetual observation mode; everything fascinated me. Not only was the journey revelatory as it related to my study, I was going through an intensely emotional and highly personal experience with my father. We had lived within 100 miles of each for my entire married life, and now, it will require a flight to get to him. I can no longer rush to his side when he is frightened about medical or memory issues. As I watched him interact with our Texas family, I cried tears of joy and sadness. I knew that they loved him and would take care of him, but what would my new relationship with my father entail? The experience was overpowering; I found myself observing everyone and everything. When I first began this exploration into my multiracial identity, I prefaced it with Latino/a studies and LatCrit Theory. I had not considered the impact of Whiteness on my life because I had never felt White, yet my multiracial identity is premised on a combination of races that includes being White. I learned that, although my father viewed me as principally Hispanic, I was considered to be White by my Mexican family and by my father's wife. Dora, my father's wife, viewed me as possessing the attributes of Whiteness that could help her negotiate with medical personnel, utility companies, and banks during the move. I gladly supported her, and asked whatever questions were needed to secure necessary documents and assistance.

Although I have stated that my family is my community from which I gather information related to defining my identity, I found that both sides of my family viewed me as primarily one or the other of my dominant races. Both families viewed me as either Mexican or White, but rarely a combination of the two. My recent experiences with both extended families have prompted me to be intentional about defining myself as a

multiracial individual. I am my mother's daughter. *Yo soy la hija de mi padre.* I am my parents' child – I am the descendent of both of them; I am Mexican AND White. Although I have navigated between being Mexican or White most of my life, as a fifty-four year old multiracial woman, I choose to be both. More than the title multiracial, I find myself wanting to declare the ingredients that comprise my multidimensional heritage. As I summarize in my one-woman show, "when you ask me what race I am, I have to ask you…which parent matters most?"

Reflections on Act 5, Scene 2

My desire to merge my identity by disavowing my ability to disconnect the impact of my individual parents places me within a fully-integrated multiracial identity model. As I have journeyed through the social interactions of my life, I believe that my military upbringing played a significant role in guiding me to a healthy multiracial identity. According to Cheng and Lee (2009), "multiracial individuals who grow up in communities that are more tolerant of and friendly toward multiracial individuals may have more positive experiences regarding their multiracial status" (p. 64). Although my parents' divorce may have caused their need to define their children from a predominantly monoracial posture, the factors that influenced my multiracial identity development came from the years that they were together. Living around the world on military bases with other multiracial children provided the stability and positive experiences that would later help offset negative ones experienced in my adolescence. Whether my current multiracial identity reflects Poston's (1990) integrated identity, Roccas' and Brewer's (2002) merger identity, or Rockquemore's (1999) border identity, I have discovered that I can comfortably reside within both of my dominant heritages

without diminishing or elevating either one. I am confident that my autoethnography journey led me to my identity's resting place. I hope that my journey will not only address the identity issues for me, but will enable readers of my study to enter critical reflection of their own identities and their relationships to others (Sparkes, 2000). Perhaps my study will, as Spry (2001) noted, not serve "simply [as] a confessional tale of self-renewal; [but as] a provocative weave of story and theory" (p. 713). May others learn from my experiences as I have learned from them; each reader's interactions with texts, both visual and written, will invoke individual and personal responses. May they serve to change how people think about themselves and others.

CHAPTER 5
EPILOGUE: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS OF MY INWARD JOURNEY

My name is Marie Castro Bruner. I am multiracial. Focusing on the definition of what being multiracial means to me began with an inward journey that reaches outward to those who also struggle to find identity and community. I conducted my study because I felt that my story would resonate with others. This study was compelled by and sustained by a strong desire to encourage other multiracial individuals , including myself, to define and categorize self rather than allowing a world that continues to sort and classify people based upon race to do so. Choosing to use narratives that share social interactions in which race played a role in shaping my emerging multiracial identity development provides a model for other multiracial individuals to follow with respect to self-identification and self-awareness. Although I do not believe that others need to go to the same extent that I did with respect to social media and internet presence, I do believe that reflection and journaling about social interactions that influence identity development would be beneficial for multiracial individuals. Actually, I believe that reflective journaling provides a constructive outlet for anyone trying to understand self and others since the writing process is revelatory. As I searched for clarity, I found ambiguity. I longed for something that I could not produce – a neat and tidy category into which I could place myself…and I found none. I also discovered that being multiracial meant challenging existing categories due to their incapacity to define me. Near the end of my one-woman show, I state, *"Basically, I'm pretty much just a Heinz 57 mutt."* Although some may contend that I have maligned myself, I believe that I have adequately summarized my identity. I am the sum total of all of the ingredients that I possess, those which add flavor to my life and provide richness to my experiences. I embrace the

struggles and difficulties of being multiracial because my experiences have made me who I am and have taught me a great deal. This chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on what I learned through interrogating self as well as a forum to discuss implications for this study

My autoethnographic journey was both personally cathartic and academically rigorous. Writing my story was challenging and rewarding because I was able to articulate so many things that I had bottled up for most of my life. Tracing the route of my multiracial identity development became essential to my identity as a Spanish teacher, as a mother, as a daughter, and as a person. Telling my story became an imperative so that I could fully feel my experiences, intentionally reflect on them, and share them so that others could share in my experience and relate to my story, changing them and changing our world (Ellis, 2002). Creating the narratives contained herein was an arduous task; however, the resultant text can be used by theorists to reinforce current multiracial identity theory. Much of the writing strengthens the argument of the social interactive nature and varying stages within multiracial identity development. During the final stages of analysis within this study, I examined current studies of multiracial identity development to adhere to the relevance that should exist within autoethnography (Tracy, 2010). As I investigated current multiracial identity studies, I found that my study fills a gap that previous research identified as needful. According to Miville et al (2005), "research investigating the social context of racial identity development is greatly needed. The current findings on the significance of people, places, and time periods in this vein provide a further impetus to research in this area" (p. 515). Binning et al (2009) concluded their study by stating that their belief was that "in order to provide the clearest

picture of the multiracial experience, future research on multiracial psychology would benefit from acknowledging the importance of multiracial individuals' interpretation of their multiracial status and not simply their awareness of their multiple group memberships" (p. 47). My study, although not longitudinal in a traditional sense, investigated multiracial identity development over my lifetime. Charmaraman and Grossman (2010) proposed that "future research in racial– ethnic centrality should also include longitudinal studies that follow participants over the course of adolescence and early adulthood, which is a transitional period of identity development." (p. 150). Cheng and Lee (2009) suggested "that multiracial social programs and policies need to consider both individuals' objective memberships in racial categories as well as their subjective perceptions of the relationship between racial groups" (p. 65). My study delved deeply into my subjective perceptions about racial categories and placement within them. Cheng and Lee (2009) proposed that "that individual beliefs, experiences, and recall powerfully shape how multiracialism is experienced" (p. 65); this study investigated my memories and experiences, impacting my previous beliefs of race and shaping my multiracial identity development. Multiracial identity theorists desire to investigate the multiracial experiences via longitudinal studies and personal narrative; my study provides both.

Some of the questions posed within my study as I sought to summarize what being multiracial means to me provided insight into one person's struggle; it is possible that others may corroborate my feelings and add to the discussion of what multiracial identity means to them. My study provided empowerment for me since it fostered self-discovery and self-declaration; however, simply having the ability to self-identify is not sufficient to provide identity. There is an imperative to consider the impact of race and

naming as social constructs. Additionally, layers of confusion exist when asking a person to describe or name self when delineations exist due to race, ethnicity, and nationality. Identification based upon race and ethnicity, whether by self or by others, either sustains or deconstructs existing social structures resulting in inner turmoil for the multiracial individual. Conflicts must be reconciled in order to negotiate social interactions and sense of self. My study also has the potential to impact other marginalized groups as they investigate identity development resulting from social interactions. Critical reflection related to identity formation should be done by all marginalized individuals in order to gain empowerment and understanding. Regardless of the label or name, each person should ask him- or herself, "What does being '[fill in the blank with marginalized label]' mean to me?" because ultimately our understanding of ourselves determines how we interact with others and how we engage with our world. I hope that telling my story makes a difference in the world; the self-interrogation process definitely made a difference in my world.

My inward journey took me to emotional places that I had pushed down with humor and naiveté. I had not even begun to realize how strongly I felt about certain situations in my life until I visited them during the writing of the one-woman show or heard about them through my parents' or daughter's voices or even my own. I was gripped by my own interview because I broke down at the end. I had waited until the end of data collection to interview myself and I was overwhelmed with emotion as I began to articulate the confusion that I experienced and the connections that I sought. I am beginning to understand why I wince at comments made about Mexicans; it is because I am connected to a Mexican. My father is Mexican. I am his daughter. I realize that I am

only half-Mexican, but the intimacy of the connection that I feel with respect to my father is what empowers the negative and prejudicial statements. Anti-Mexican sentiments are personal and my identity as Timoteo Castro's daughter is personal.

Findings

The research questions guiding this study were: How have I internalized and interpreted encounters related to racial identification, and what does being multiracial mean to me? As I progressed through the narrative analysis process, I discovered the following:

1. Being multiracial is fluid; we are never one race at all times;
2. Identifying as a monoracial is problematic because of the fluidity that exists within being multiracial;
3. Coming to terms with being multiracial involves understanding current theoretical models for multiracial identity;
4. Stories about race are always situated within other stories, complicating the concept of multiracial since it is never experienced in isolation; and
5. Looking at multiracial identity development cannot and should not focus solely on the racial identity revealed through physical feature; it is important to consider the impact of the racial identity that is not readily identifiable – for me, it was significant to look at being White.

Finding #1: Being multiracial is fluid; we are never one race at all times.

When I first began this study, multiracial theories were relatively new in the academy even though the existence of multiracial individuals and presence of multiracial issues are centuries old. Many of the theories emerged due to the inclusion of the

multiracial category on public documents in the year 2000. Admittedly, scholars assent to the fact that hurdles exist for multiracial individuals depending upon their capacity to identify as White or their incapacity to do so based upon appearance. Since I began this study, several of the prominent scholars proposing multiracial identity theories are revisiting their suppositions and taking new stances that are affirmed within my study. The fluidity of racial identity contests the notion that multiracial individuals eventually arrive at a stable racial identity (Burke & Kao, 2013; Poston, 1990; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002); what newer research asserts is that identities continue to evolve during a lifetime and change due to social contexts rather than developmental stages in an individual (Burke & Kao, 2013; Doyle & Kao, 2007). Within Burke and Kao's 2013 study, the researchers asserted that the ability to self-identify as multiracial rather than as White or as the race consistent with physical appearance has a more positive result within adolescent academic performance; however, they concluded that social context is the greatest impact in identity and shifts in identity. Other scholars contend that the inability to align with a static racial identity causes negative psychological issues among multiracial individuals (Sanchez, Shih & Garcia, 2009).

What does being multiracial mean to me? To everything, there is a time and season. Being multiracial means realizing that your identity is constantly in a stage of change. The older you get, the more you understand and evaluate what and who you are.

Finding #2: Identifying as a monoracial is problematic because of the fluidity that exists within being multiracial.

Rather than assuming that the multiracial category simplifies racial contexts for the individual, theorists emphasize the complexity of the term within various settings, particularly theoretical, political and social contexts (Shih & Sanchez, 2009). Identity, sense of self, and feeling connected to community are all struggles for the individual possessing multiple racial and cultural backgrounds (Lou, Lalonde & Wilson, 2011). Remedios and Chasteen (2013) contend that multiracial individuals seek affirmation from others regarding racial ascription and that social interactions provide opportunities for validation and/or negation of multiracial identity. One of the most prominent scholars within multiracial identity theory development is Kerry Rocquemore; Rockquemore and colleagues now propose a multidimensional model that embraces the social construction nature of identity development and "allows for individuals to indicate experiencing contextual shifting of identities, holding multiple simultaneous identities, or adopting no racial identity at all" (Lou, Lalonde & Wilson, 2011, p. 81). Brunsma, Delgado, and Rockquemore (2013) conclude that the multiracial identity can be best described as a "matrix" that allows for shift and change during one's lifetime. The flexibility of current multiracial identity models connect with what I discovered about my own multiracial identity development within this study. Within my narratives, I share my struggle to gain a sense of self as well as my desire for community. Ultimately, I conclude that my family (including my siblings who share my multiracial heritage and my children who inherited my blended cultural background) are my community. Individuals outside of my family context either choose to assign me to pre-existing categories or disavow my connections to people who are precious to me; either social context is unacceptable to me.

What does being multiracial mean to me? My titles of daughter, mother, and grandmother mean more to me than my racial label or labels. The human need for community and a sense of belonging are strong; many multiracial individuals find community and belonging within a particular racial group. My experience has been that I am more at home moving in and out of White and Mexican identities rather than residing in one or the other. My multiracial identity embraces all that I am. Just as I have many titles, I have many identities and I can be all of them.

Finding #3: Coming to terms with being multiracial involves understanding current theoretical models for multiracial identity development.

With the inclusion of the multiracial category on public documents in the year 2000, theoretical frameworks have appeared on the scholarly landscape in an effort to understand individuals who have always existed, but not have the opportunity to define themselves. As scholars investigated how multiracial individuals view themselves, they proposed various theoretical models for multiracial identity development (Poston, 1990; Root, 1996; and Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Doubtless, there are even more models on the horizon as multiracial studies become more prolific within the academy. Whether or not I fit all the stages of all the models proposed, it was important to locate myself within existing models in order to understand self as well as suggest other issues to be considered when looking at multiracial identity development. One of the most important things that I encountered within my review of existing literature was the predominant focus on issues related to multiracials of Black and White lineage. Since the primary emphasis was on a combination of heritages with which I could relate on a

small scale, I had to consider what LatCrit Theory imposed upon my study. Although there is a commonality to the experience of being multiracial, culture and ethnicity are factors which must be considered because of the various contexts encountered. I discovered that language and culture were significant influences on my multiracial identity. Sharing my story, through the lenses of LatCrit Theory and Whiteness studies, contributes to the ongoing multiracial identity development conversations in a specific way. The variegated multiracial experience creates a challenge for researchers who attempt to develop identity theory; however, it is imperative to consider the numerous factors that influence multiracial identity development without falling into a trap of considering limited and limiting combinations of backgrounds.

What does being multiracial mean to me? I can learn from those who have gone before, and share my story to benefit others. Understanding what other multiracial individuals experience as they search for meaning, significance, and understanding provides a framework for understanding self.

Finding #4: Stories about race are always situated within other stories, complicating the concept of multiracial since it is never experienced in isolation.

The social identity quest is a lifelong endeavor that includes the impact of social interactions with others (Mead, 1934). Human lives intersect with others and symbolic interactions include factors that enrich or obstruct identity development such as race, family dynamics, social status, and economic factors. For the multiracial child, family dynamics automatically include the impact of race on identity development due to connections that are affirmed or denied based upon physical appearance. My story was

and is situated within larger stories of race during the Civil Rights era, interracial relationships in the military, racial prejudice in the South, and the current climate of anti-Hispanic sentiment. As I told my story, I sought to find my place in the world by classifying myself according to existing social and racial categories (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, Hitlin & Elder, 2006). My multiracial identity development story takes place within several social contexts – my Southern White family, my Mexican family, my military upbringing, and my roles as parent and as educator. My story is a story within so many other stories; it was important to evaluate the intersections and find meaning in the junctures. For me, the most significant aspect of locating factors which were important to my story was the context of environment. Whether I was evaluating the impact of growing up in military bases or considering the effect of racism, I was analyzing how my story did not and could not exist in isolation. My research questions included the importance of story within story since my goal was to ask myself how I have internalized and interpreted encounters related to racial identification; this study was designed to consider my personal story at the point of intersection.

What does being multiracial mean to me? My story intersected and continues to overlap the stories of others; as I traverse through life, I continue to unpack what it means to be multiracial. As society evolves, social constructs and definitions change. No man is an island; each social encounter in my life has and will continue to contribute to multiracial identity development and understanding.

Finding #5: Looking at multiracial identity development cannot and should not focus solely on racial identity revealed through physical feature; it is important to consider the impact of the racial identity that is not readily identifiable – for me, it was significant to look at being White.

When I began this study, I focused on the racial category to which I have been assigned most of my life. I chose to do my investigation looking through a LatCrit Theory lens in an effort to understand the connections that exist in being Latino/a or being considered Latino/a. As I delved further into data generation and analysis, I realized that I was equally White. Although few may consider me White based upon my physical appearance, I have encountered situations in which people are incredulous with respect to my Hispanic background. They have even categorically stated, "But you don't act Mexican." Somehow, they viewed me as White. A closer look reveals that I, too, have considered myself White and have related to others through a context of privilege and power. When I began to consider the impact of Whiteness on my multiracial identity development, it was revelatory. Choices that I had made became comprehensible to me whereas, a strictly Latino/a posture would not be able to absorb decisions related to culture and language. As I looked deeper into Whiteness studies, I gained understanding related to what it means to be White. Additionally, I needed to consider the fact that many Latinos/as choose to identify themselves as White when completing forms related to demographics (Stokes-Brown, 2012). Whiteness was a significant factor for me; I could not ignore how it impacted naming and identity. As I perused my stories, I found how Whiteness had influenced my identity development, from my colorblind mentality to my ability to assign names based upon race. Perhaps the power that eventually donned as

a mantel of choice comes from my Whiteness as well; my move to an integrated multiracial identity assumes the ability to do so. Rather than subscribing to a doomed identity of subordination, I choose my multiracial identity – is it the Whiteness in me that gives me that power? I wonder.

What does being multiracial mean to me? Rather than seeking acceptance from others and fitting a mold that they assign to me, I choose to embrace all that I am, and share what I have learned from my journey with others. For me, it is about connection to the people who matter most to me rather than connection to the people who try to label me. I do not need to struggle to "fit in" or "find my place" in this world, I can be me – a woman who grew up on burritos and black-eyed peas.

Implications of the Study

The implications of my study are far reaching. Not only does this study reinforce current multiracial theory, it adds to the discussion of fluidity of identity during the lifespan of an individual as well as contributes to the multiracial identity discussion by presenting an experience outside of the predominate Black/White racial combination Additionally, this study contributes to ongoing discussions related to using autoethnography as a qualitative research method as well as affirming the relevance of presenting scholarly work in online venues in order to promote change. My study also has practical implications in the field of education, theoretical implications in the world of academia, and implications that suggest a need for further research.

Implications for Practice

As an educator, I found that my study impacts my role as a mentor for young adults. There are implications within this study for all educators as well as for lawmakers who make decisions about educational policies that govern teachers. Educational stakeholders, from students to administrators, should consider how race and racism continues to guide how we engage with each other within our educational system. Five implications related to educational practices are:

(1) **Demographic information needs to be re-evaluated, particularly as it relates to self-identification as multiracial.** It is important to the look at the power that exists within naming since political and economic decisions include racial categories as significant factors for inclusion and exclusion (Boris, 2005). As an educator, I have overheard numerous conversations related to performance and its connection to race. Whether deciding on the ideal candidate to fill a position or determining curricular needs, race and racism seem to play a role in educational spheres. This study attends to the complications that are inherent within demographic categories, especially as they connect to those who self-identify as multiracial. There is a call to those who are in positions of power and influence, such as lawmakers and educators, to consider the impact of laws and policies that do not consider the existence and furtherance of racism within our society. More study is needed to understand the evolving nature of demographics as they include the multiracial option.

(2) **Categorization and Labeling within education presents more troubling social issues than beneficial information.** Another implication of this study

is the construct of naming within demographics, particularly as they are applied within educational contexts. It has always been uncomfortable for me to choose a particular racial category in which to reside for the purpose of documentation. Within the contexts of student and educator, I understand the societal implications of being considered a "minority". Additionally, the question of considering people to be members of minority groups needs to be reviewed and evaluated. When we boast about the presence of minorities within our schools workplaces, are we boasting about our power over them? Have we assigned a place of relegation to those who we have allowed to join us because of our ability to overlook inadequacies inherent in racism? Are we more inclusive when we view people through disadvantaged and subordinate lenses? It is important to the look at the power that exists within naming since political and economic decisions include racial categories as significant factors for inclusion and exclusion (Boris, 2005).

(3) **When evaluating current demographics, educators and policy makers must consider the meaningful layers that exist.** There is an additional factor to consider when focusing on the influence of race; there are assumptions made about the socioeconomic status and educational potential of those who are non-White, or mixtures thereof. We need to consider the limitations that we place upon each other; as a teacher, I need to ask myself if I am sorting students based upon their racial profile and what the educational demographic studies reveal. When I shared with my advanced Spanish students about my dissertation, many were openly moved and compelled to share with me their

struggles of being labeled or misidentified. They were equally frustrated about educators and others denying their connection to family members based upon race. Regardless of what we want to believe about progress in race relations and abolition of racism, race continues to play a role in identity development and social interactions. As an educator, I need to consider the role that it plays with my students as individuals as well as its existence as a social construct that binds or divides them.

(4) **Race and racism discussions should be integrated into the curriculum.** From a personal standpoint as an educator, I believe that teachers play an important role in the lives of the students within their care. As I lamented within my study, there were several instances in which I wish that an adult informed me about the way in which I presented and labeled myself. Since race, racism, demographic naming, and sorting influence our educational system, I believe that it is my responsibility to engage students in meaningful conversations about the influence of social factors that promote and negate them due to factors that they cannot control. Since this study, I have been more mindful of the conversations that take place within my classroom and I have been more diligent to redirect students who carelessly place monikers upon themselves or their peers. This study could also serve as a resource for those who teach multicultural studies or multicultural literature because it detours from clear racial lines and promotes a need to understand the impact of race and racism beyond the norm.

(5) **Literature about the multiracial experience needs to be produced and integrated into the curriculum.** Inevitably, readers of my study will reach their own conclusions and define their own implications as it relates to generalizability and change in their own lives and contexts. As an individual, the process that I have undergone to conduct this study has been personally transformative. As a new grandmother, I have endured several conversations about my grandson's skin tone. As I held him, I was overcome with what life will be like for him in the next fifty years. When he is my age, how will racism and multiracialism be defined and lived out? His life compels me to act on a lifelong dream of mine; I plan to take what I have gleaned from this study and present what I have learned in a new forum – children's literature. I hope to write books that include multiracial characters and multiracial identity development that eventually make their way onto reading lists, promoting classroom discussions about the layers that exist within the social construct known as race. I hope that my books reflect my new understandings: (1) I no longer look at myself or others in the same way. (2) I no longer negate racism and the impact of race on the individual or on society. (3) I no longer look at language in the same way; there are layers and connections to communication that are deeper and more profound than I realized. (4) I no longer simplify social constructs in order to be comfortable. I am okay with being uncomfortable. In fact, I prefer it. (5) I want to trouble the waters of the status quo; I want to be an agent of change.

Implications for Research

Within the context of scholarly investigation, there are implications related to research that emerge from this study. Four implications for scholarly research come from this study:

(1) **There is a need for additional multiracial studies that do not focus on the Black/White blend, but explore other racial combinations.** A majority of the multiracial studies that currently exist within the academy focus on individuals who are of mixed Black and White bloodlines; my study provides a unique look into a lifetime of multiracial identity development of a person of White and Latino/a backgrounds. As we continue to uncover the intricacies of multiracial identity development, it is important to consider as many varying experiences as possible in order to review and dismantle what we think of as multiracial.

(2) **Equal consideration should be given to investigating racial ascription that is not readily identifiable based upon physical appearance.** Rather than viewing multiracial identity as primarily constructed of alliance to the predominant bloodline tied to physical attributes, it becomes imperative to consider the heritage that is not easily attached to the multiracial individual – for me, it was my Whiteness. As I reflect on my military upbringing, I think about the children sitting in my classroom in Japan. Did a child who was half-White, half-Japanese feel more Japanese? What about the child who was half-Black and half-Japanese? Which racial lineage trumps the other is usually based upon phenotype characteristics; however, that does not negate the existence or the power of the other bloodline. As I read the study of multiracial individuals' opinions of President Obama presenting himself as African-American, many considered him

to be steered by society rather than choosing for self, whereas others asserted that he chose a racial category based upon political advantage (Jeffries, 2012). In either case, Obama's Whiteness had to have imposed upon his upbringing and identity development in some way. I believe that future studies into multiracial identity development need to uncover the impact of less visible heritages because they connect or disconnect individuals in meaningful ways.

(3) **Negative aspects of labeling beckons exploration in order to promote empathy and negate social injustice.** Not only does this study have potential for impacting change in how people view multiracial identity as a social construct, it specifically focused on my Latino/a heritage as a factor in my identity development and view of self. While considering how many times I have been labeled by others, I was forced to think about and consider the impact of all individuals who encounter difficult social interactions as a result of judgments based upon physical appearance. Whether it is an individual who is being pulled over based upon suspicion of wrongdoing or it is a person who continues to endure the repetitive question "What are you?", our society must consider the impact of subjugation regardless of whether it exists in seemingly innocuous forms or overtly harmful and potentially life-threatening practices. My study beckons empathy on the part of the reader; however, I also recognize that it is difficult to fully empathize with people whose experiences are inherently different than our own. Regardless, our society needs to consider the laws and social customs that result in social injustice toward each other; my study reveals that physical attributes greatly impact social interactions resulting in misunderstanding

and mistreatment. Although I believe that I have been sheltered from gross injustice, I equally believe that there are many individuals who endure alienation and bodily harm due to their skin color and outward appearance. We need more study and more stories in order to present a case for more change in our world.

(4) **Scholarly work needs to be accessible in order to be relevant and critical.** As of April 2014, the website that accompanies this study (www.burritosblackeyedpeas.com) has been visited by over 9,000 unique visitors. Additionally, there are more than 9,000 views of the site indicating that individuals are perusing the site more than once. Once comment features and feedback opportunities are launched on the website, I will be able to interact with those who visit the site. What is evident to me about these numbers is that the critical impact that I desired for this project is possible. The online presence of this study also has critical potential for teachers; one of my colleagues encouraged her sister (an educator who teaches multicultural literature at an at-risk school) to read my study and consider it as an option for required reading for her students. As universities consider the options of digital dissertations, this study provides a glimpse into the potential and possibilities of an online presence.

Further Research

This study shed light on social issues that exist due to the complexities that are inherent within an archaic system of labeling that should be dismantled. Whether or not multiracial as a label could be applied to every individual or whether dominant bloodlines have an impact on social standing or educational potential, what is clear is that more questions and more probing needs to take place in order to eradicate social injustices

where they exist. Social issues presented within this study lead to other topics for further research, including the impact of intersectionality and diaspora on multiracial families. My mother absorbed and promoted my father's culture; there are issues of power, race, and gender that could be revelatory. Additionally, the Latino/a community in the state of Georgia has changed dramatically during my lifetime, and that of my father's; how did separation from his homeland and community of heritage reveal itself in his life and, by extension ours? This study is a springboard for other topics, and not only sheds light on social and educational issues; it reinforces the value of autoethnography as a methodology for study. In fact, multiracial theorists (Binning et al, 2009; Charmaran & Grossman, 2010; Cheng & Lee, 2009) indicate a need for personal reflection and subjective storytelling in order to understand multiracial identity development. There is a need for further research on presenting self in order to understand other identity formations as well as society as a whole. When we understand ourselves and how we interact with and view our world, we can share our findings in a way that promotes change; this study encourages and presents the value of investigating self and sharing the findings. There is a warning, however, that accompanies the charge – autoethnography is challenging on every level and requires a commitment to transparency and honesty; it is not for the faint of heart.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MEMORY LIST GENERATED FOR ONE-WOMAN SHOW

The Chocolate Boy	In first grade, an African American child vehemently denied my relationship with my mother.
The Maid's Child	When people look at our family picture from the Philippines, most people think that our maid is my mother.
A Near Death Experience	I almost drowned in the Gulf of Mexico as a child; the way that my Mexican family responded affected me deeply.
The Children's Table	Holidays at the Horton house were a time of segregation based on contribution
Playing Cleopatra	In fifth grade, I played the role of Cleopatra because I was "exotic" looking; I was singled out for looking different.
Half Breed, that's all I ever heard	Living in Japan, most of the children that I knew were half breeds; I wanted to have long blonde hair and blue eyes like Jamie.
History Repeats Itself?	My mother tried to match me up with a Mexican military man in the ninth grade. The African American soldier was off limits.

You be Chinese?	At Valdosta High School, my peers thought that I was Asian due to the limited Hispanic presence at our school.
Heritage Speaker, but NOT!	When I was nominated for the Governor's Honors Program, the judges were sure that I had learned Spanish at home. My language studies have always been hampered by what they think I know.
Scholarships and Grants	I used the Hispanic connection to get money for college.
Fitting in at the Finishing School	I attended a predominately White liberal arts college for women; the minority presence was small and I did not know where or how to fit in.
Chic Spick and the Back to the Bible Boogie Band	In high school, I wore a shirt with the word "spic" prominently emblazoned on the back; I participated in a skit where my name used a derogatory term…my concern is that no one stopped me from doing this.
Beat You to the Punch	I began my comedic routine and family storytelling in college for the entertainment of others; I had an Italian friend who did the same—let me make the racial dig before someone else does. How'd your "day go"? "Whopping Good"!
The Asian Connection	As a newlywed, the Asian convenience store worker was certain that I was of Korean descent; my manicurist assured me that I looked like her Vietnamese cousin; my brothers look Samoan…and the list goes on.
Becoming a Spanish teacher	I studied drama and French in college yet the principal in the small South Georgia town where I lived was certain that I could be his next Spanish teacher. Upon what was he basing his certainty?

La Gordita	I have struggled with obesity my entire life. Both of my heritages have been blamed for the struggle.
Like Father, Like Daughter	My husband's family did not embrace my Mexican heritage. One of the most awkward situations was when my husband chose to confront his grandmother about her prejudice towards me.
The Mayonnaise Baby	When my daughter was born, one of my siblings called her the "mayonnaise baby" because of how pale she was…this hurt!
Red and yellow, black, brown and white	My son amended the lyrics to "Jesus loves the little children" so that Jesus could love him and me.
Brown people vs. White people	There have always been assumptions that my husband and I are divorcees with children from previous marriages because of the distinct differences of skin tone; we turned it into a joke.
Pursuing a Masters in Spanish	After a 15 year hiatus from speaking and using Spanish, I began a Master's program. The assumptions made about my language ability have always been a struggle for me.
WHAT are you?	How my principal approaches me regarding my racial ascription has always been an interesting conversation. Recently, my heritage has been in question in many arenas.
Mexistashing	My students take liberties with making derogatory comments about Mexicans in my classroom. How I address these comments has always been a struggle for me.

Teaching Native Speakers & Heritage Speakers	My Spanish was learned in the classroom and not at home; identity crises and inadequacies prevail when Native & Heritage speakers are placed in my classrooms
Native Speaker Co-Workers	Inadequacy cannot begin to describe how I feel about working with Native speakers
Siblings and Spanish	The relationship of my siblings and Spanish has impacted me since I am the only one who speaks Spanish; I am the only one who can communicate with my father's wife—that has become significant in recent years as dementia has begun to set in.
In the Doctor's Office	Recently I was asked about heritage at the doctor's office; I watched to see if everyone had to fill out the form. They did not.
Mom's 70th Birthday	At my mother's 70th birthday party, the topic of my dissertation came up; it was revelatory. My aunts and uncles were amazed that we believed ourselves to be multiracial. They never thought of us as Mexican or with minority status.
But You Don't Act Mexican?	Recently, a colleague was talking to me about my dissertation and blurted out that I didn't act Mexican. I had just read about complimentary othering and then I experienced it.
My Dad's A Blackfoot Indian?	When my mother had her surgery for breast cancer, my aunt and uncle came up to sit with my siblings and me. We were discussing my parents' history and my uncle was surprised to find out that my father had Aztec roots because my grandfather had always called him a Blackfoot Indian (a derogatory commented at skintone).
My daughter and racism	My daughter recently moved to a small community in North Carolina where there is a large Hispanic population; her dealings with the community have resulted in reverse discrimination. For the first time in her life, she's struggling with having Mexican blood. When she shares with me, my inner struggle is great.

The Mayonnaise Baby	When my daughter was born, one of my siblings called her the "mayonnaise baby" because of how pale she was…this hurt!
Red and yellow, black, brown and white	My son amended the lyrics to "Jesus loves the little children" so that Jesus could love him and me.
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In the Doctor's Office	Recently I was asked about heritage at the doctor's office; I watched to see if everyone had to fill out the form. They did not.

APPENDIX B: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRIES

Racism in America

09/17/2013

The 2014 Miss America pageant sparked ignorant comments about heritage and race; a young woman of Indian heritage was tagged as Muslim and Arab even though her country of ancestry is thousands of miles away from the Middle East and her religion is Hinduism.

The beauty queen graciously disregarded the negative comments as well as those linked to stereotypes attributed to her heritage as well. One tweet called her "Miss 7-11" refering to the number of convenience store employees of Indian heritage.

Why the discussion of Miss America? Because the rants reveal a deeper issue--racism exists, stereotypes confine, and words hurt. Even though Miss America chooses to ignore the racist comments, the words said about her and to her may be impacting those who love her and/or connect with her. The Indian community may be feeling the hurtful comments in a way that causes alienation and pain.

Often during my study, I have commented on the impact of words and the power that they have both to harm and to heal. The negative words that have been flying through digital spaces related to Miss America's background reveal two issues that greatly concern me: (1) hurtful insults based upon skin color, national heritage, and religious background run deep and (2) the Internet provides a forum where people do not seem to care about the impact of their words; they simply fling them out into cyberspace and do not care where or how they land.

We are becoming more connected and yet, less interconnected with technology. I have no idea who will read this posting or how many people may stumble across it. Most likely, I will never meet the people who have seen a glimpse of my heart and mind as it relates to racism in America.

How do I reconcile who I am? I am half White and half Mexican. Some people think that I am Asian. Sometimes I purposefully embrace one side of my heritage in front of the opposite side just to see the reactions; for example, I speak Spanish to Hispanics in public and watch White people. Do they think of me as a White person who has "learned Spanish" or do they think I am just another one of "them"...the other?

Recently, my daughter encountered a woman who told her that she looked "regular" even though her mother did not. Regular? So, am I irregular? The articles related to the diversity within the Miss America pageant spoke to the rise of minorities in American culture and yet, there is still the dominant White culture.

And yet, I am part of the White culture...or am I? Just because my mother is White, am I? I don't look White. I don't get to feel White because others don't think of me as White. Wow! What is the impact of this study and what does being multiracial mean to me? Is my confusion and alienation self-inflicted? Current events say no...and yet, I wonder.

Generation to Generation

09/06/2013

Lately, I have been thinking a great deal about what is handed down from generation to generation. Whether there are physical or personality similarities to former generations, we reflect nature and nurture. While we were in Brownsville, we took my father to my grandmother's gravesite. The picture to the left is of him leaning in to read the details on her stone, the day she entered this world and the day that she left.

Although my abuelita was a harsh and strict woman, she was my father's mother and he missed her. I know the stories that I have heard about their relationship and I wish that I really knew what went on in my father's childhood to make him the man who put his imprint on my life.

How am I like my father? Other than the genetic stamp of dark hair, dark skin, and dark eyes, I am like my father with respect to work ethic and value of education. I can also be harsh and critical, but don't we all want to focus on the positive traits that we have inherited? As I delve into my study of multiracial identity, I know that there are so many aspects to live that influence and impact identity. I look at this picture and I think of the frail man that my father has become in his later years. When most people look at him and see his life now, they would never know what he has conquered in this world and how he championed the causes of so many people.

One day, he will have a stone that will mark his entrance and exit days. I know that my father's days impacted my life and many of the choices I have made, including identity ones. Today, I soberly reflect on the days that I have. How am I impacting my children? How will they be like me? Although I have a physical connection to my father and most people readily see my heritage due to my outward appearance, no one would ever know that my daughter had Latino roots...unless she says something. Eventually, will my grandchildren and great-grandchildren even know that they had a Mexican ancestor? I wonder.

Affirmation & Progress

08/28/2013

On Monday, I decided that I would resolve to daily dedication to this project. I have been rising early to start my day and make sure that I have time to reflect and research. It is difficult to teach school (and do a good job) and pursue a degree. Although I have given up several extracurricular commitments, I have still not dedicated the time and effort necessary to reach my goal.

When I made the decision to be faithful, I was pleased to be affirmed by my advisors. When I got to school, I went through my daily chore of checking my email accounts and found one from one of my advisors who was checking in on me and my progress. It was a sign. I felt rewarded for my commitment and the three days since have been highly productive with respect to writing, resolution, and clarity of purpose.

Sometimes, all you need is a pat on the back and words of affirmation to keep you moving in the right direction. I am grateful for the emails that I received and I have resolved to be more communicative with my advisors and to hold myself accountable for progress reports on a weekly basis--not for them, necessarily, but for me.

Today, I feel like I can see the end...the end is near;D

Today is the First Day of the Rest of the Journey

08/26/2013

Today is the first day of classes at Georgia State University for the fall semester. I have decided that it is my first day back as well. I took time off this summer and for the beginning of my school year because I allowed myself to become overwhelmed by everything that was going on in my life. Today is a new day. Today is the first day to "put my hands to the plow" and begin again. It is easy to get tripped up in life and to allow the tumbles and falls to keep us down. This is definitely the course of action that I have taken...to this point.

Today I will begin again. I will take the time to reflect on what needs to be done and then to begin doing it. I know that I need to interview my mother and my daughter. I also need to contact my advisors and be more diligent to remain in contact with them as accountability for myself. This journey towards my PhD has been long and arduous because I have allowed myself to fall into the very habits that have kept me from accomplishing other goals in my life. I can change that. I choose to. Today is a new day!

Brown people & White people

07/18/2013

Today is July 18th. It is a day that we celebrate in our house because my son's birthday is July 8th and my daughter's is July 28th -- this is their "mid-birthday". As I think about my children, I think about how we handled the differences between them in our home.

Bethany is tall; Aaron is short. Bethany is fair-skinned; Aaron is dark-skinned. Bethany looks like her dad; Aaron looks like me. Many times during their childhood, we would sit in our skin toned pairs across the table from each other in restaurants. My husband and I would joke that people must think that we are divorcees with children from previous marriages coming together in a blended family.

We called ourselves the brown people and the white people. We began to see similarities between our counterparts. There were personality traits that were similar. We began to name things by who would do them. "It's a brown people thing!" or "That's what the white people do!" We did, of course, do this naming within the context of our home and inner circle. We didn't want anyone to think that we were prejudiced. It was our way of dealing with the differences.

Sadly, my father joined in on the "fun", but his naming was hurtful. Bethany was White so she wasn't Mexican. She didn't really "belong" in the family. Truth be told, Daddy Timo, there are a lot of White Mexicans in Mexico City! Blond haired, blue-eyed Mexicans.

Like the Mighty Mississippi

06/29/2013

One of the coolest welcome centers moving from state to state is the one entering Mississippi from Louisiana on Interstate 20 heading East. The building has a deck overlooking the Mississippi River and the impressive bridge that you cross to get to the Center. My husband and I asked a bored teenager to take our picture in front of the bridge. I wanted to remember this moment and reflect on my trip to Texas. I hope that my retirement years are full of road trips like this one. It was so different than the road trips of my childhood when my father refused to make pitstops, we ate bagged lunches to save money, and we spent most of our time arguing with each other and fighting for space in the backseat of a sedan that lacked air conditioning.

My road trip to Texas was transformative. On the way to Texas, I drove my father's car and his wife accompanied me. My husband drove the truck that carried all of my father's worldly goods and he was subjected to repeated conversations and questions. I am blessed to be married to a man who does not grow weary in doing good; he answered the same questions over and over again and he listened to the same comments repeatedly without frustration. I had two days of conversations that were completely in Spanish; I had to circumlocute for words I did not know and I learned new words as Dora and I shared our lives and stories with one another. My perspective on aging and life were impacted by this trip. Although I had always been moved by stories of people who had loved ones with Alzheimer's, it doesn't really hit you until you are actually in the story yourself.

My father's once sharp mind and quick wit have been relegated to the precious memories that he clings to with ferocity. His life as an immigration specialist, an enlisted man in the military, and a high school athlete are the identities he holds dear. He wanted to go home. He marveled at how much his hometown had changed and I could see the sadness in his eyes and hear it in his voice. He couldn't go back. There are no do-overs in life. Life is comprised of the little decisions that you make on a day-to-day basis and then you look back on those decisions with joy or with sadness. The time with my dad affirmed his pride in his children, his sadness over a failed marriage, his gratitude for his companion for the end of his life, and his need to feel connected. I think that's why he wanted to go home. He wanted to be close to his roots and what he could remember clearly.

During one of the first few days of our arrival in Brownsville, my dad's wife crossed the border into Mexico to visit her ailing mother. She left my father in my care. I awoke one morning to find that he had locked himself in his room because he couldn't remember where he was and he didn't know where she was. He was frightened. Later that day, he told me that he was losing his mind. I wept quietly inside. My father had always been such a strong and imposing figure in my life and now he is frail and willing to admit his need and dependence upon others.

As my husband and I drove home, I spent a lot of time thinking about and talking to Ken about the people in our lives and the busyness of our schedules and professions. I made a decision that I would choose how my days and time would be spent so that I feel that I am investing in others rather than hurrying through activity that may or may not be beneficial to me or to those who I hold dear. As I thought of my study and my pursuit of my doctorate, I wondered if it were worth the time, effort, and money that I had already invested. I wondered what would happen if I just gave up and threw in the towel. I decided that it was part of my journey and that my story may help others in their journeys and so....I move forward.

Not Like I Remembered

06/28/2013

My father's family tree is confusing to me. Thankfully, my husband talked with my cousins (who are bilingual) and wrote everything down so that I could understand the various relationships and connections.

Everything about my visit to Brownsville was rich and enjoyable. I was amazed at the warmth and love that flowed from my cousins. We were overwhelmed with generosity and no one was like I remembered. Where were the people who laughed at and poked fun at me?

Perhaps things are different because I am now able to move easily between English and Spanish with them. Perhaps I feel more like family because I accepted them as readily as they do me. Perhaps things are different because I have matured and I am in a different season of life where family means so much more.

In any case, I could not compare this experience with memory because it was so different. The one cousin that was decidedly different for me is my cousin Mari (pictured left). I remember her as larger than life and imposing, at times, even threatening. Although she took care of me when I was a teenager suffering from Montezuma's Revenge in Tampico, Mexico, she scared me. Now a retired nurse, she has a taqueria in the flea market. She serves the most delicious meals and her demeanor is one of generosity and kindness. And she's tiny. She's tiny like my "Abuelita Porfiria" with whom she shares a name.

She is Porfiria Maria and I am Marie Evelyn. We are second cousins. Somos familia.

Culture Shock??

06/27/2013

When we first arrived in Brownsville, one of the first trips that we made was to the local Walmart to stock up on household necessities and groceries. There were several things that stuck out to me and provided opportunities to evaluate cultural differences between my life in metro Atlanta and that of my relatives in south Texas:

1. They mean business when it comes to recycling and being "green". If you want your groceries to be bagged, you either (1) bring your bags or (2) purchase your bags--you don't just automatically make a choice between paper or plastic.

2. Bilingual means language mixing and Spanglish is the order of the day. Conversations move between Spanish and English and most people combine the two more often than not. My husband is a gracious man and he spent most of his time in the middle of conversations where he could only pick out a few words and phrases; however, my cousins were great about playing verbal ping pong. They spoke to him in English and each other in Spanish without skipping a beat. I learned how to play the game.

3. Fresh tortillas are important. Tortillas are a mainstay in

Mexican cuisine and people don't want factory produced staples, they want fresh. Inside the local Walmart was a tortilleria. There was a large tortilla machine and you could pay 50 cents for a dozen of fresh corn tortillas. When you dedicate that much square footage in your bakery section, you place a value on the product and demonstrate how well you know your clientele.

The fact that there is a Walmart and numerous other chain stores in Brownsville proves that it is part of America as we have come to know it, but Brownsville maintains a character and charm that is decidedly Mexican. I can't wait to go back.

Driving Daddy Timo

06/26/2013

It took three days to drive from Kennesaw, Georgia to Brownsville, Texas with my dad and his wife. My husband drove in the truck with my father while I spent the trip with Dora.

I had the rare opportunity to think and converse in Spanish for hours and hours. Dora speaks English, but not confidently. We passed the time talking about our life journeys and what had brought us to this particular trip together.

My father's desire to return to Texas was strong and I felt that I could honor him by taking him home. We spent the months of May and June paring down his possessions and getting ready for a trip that he had looked forward to for decades. He had been a resident of Georgia since 1954 and he wanted to go home. I knew that the trip would be meaningful in many ways.

I will be interacting with relatives that I have not seen in over 38 years. I am so grateful that I have the language skills to sustain conversations. It will be important to me to make sure that they understand my father's current medical condition (early Alzheimer's). I am also thankful that Dora will now be able to interact with his doctors and business in her native language. My father has been consistent in both of his marriages of exerting his machismo and wanting his wives to be completely dependent upon him.

Now that he is unable to drive and his memory is failing, he will have to rely upon Dora and she will have to develop skills that she has not been allowed to explore until now. This will be interesting. I want to make sure that he is as settled as possible during the week that I can be here with him. I understand that my personal goals and objectives will be delayed during this time, but I hope that I soak in all the culture and ask questions that help me understand my connection to my father and his family.

Home is where your heart is

06/21/2013

As I think about the upcoming road trip with Daddy and Dora, I can't help but wonder what it will be like to interact with family members that I haven't seen in almost forty years. I am grateful that I will be able to be conversant with them in Spanish, but will I feel at home?

I have been fortunate enough to travel to two places I have always wanted to see during the last couple of years -- Cuba and Mexico City. My daughter Bethany and I traveled to Cuba on a mission trip with our church. From being questioned about my connections to El Presidente due to a passport belonging to Marie **Castro** Bruner to interacting with the warm, loving people, I fell in love with the tropical paradise and felt "at home".

Engaging with the precious pastor and his wife led us to his sister and mother in the United States. We invited them to live with us because we are empty nesters with plenty of room and it provided us with a way to minister to the pastor in Cuba. If he knows that his mother and sister are well cared for, he can take care of his job without worry. The added bonus for me is that Spanish is now spoken in my home. I love it.

As a family, we worked in the garbage cities surrounding Mexico City with Operation Serve. My son and I served as translators while my daughter and husband worked in the optical and barber tents. Despite the poverty, I was "at home" and felt like I could stay there forever. Interacting with the children and the families who were educationally and circumstantially very different than my own did not "feel" different -- it felt comfortable and familiar.

I write about these trips because I'm wondering why I feel more at home in Spanish-speaking countries and living among native Speakers than I do in my own world. Is it because I fit in physically and no one questions my parentage? Do I feel more accepted as a Spanish speaker because my goal is communication and I don't feel as though my grammar is being judged?

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Georgia State University
Department of Middle-Secondary Education and Instructional Technology

Informed Consent

Title: Growing up on Burritos and Black-eyed Peas

Principal Investigator: Margaret Albers and Jodi Kaufmann
Marie Castro Bruner, *Student Principal Investigator*

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in an autoethnographic research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate and understand the development of Marie Castro Bruner's multiracial identity. You are invited to participate because you are related to her and are essential to gaining understanding of her multiracial identity development due to physical and cultural attributes that you may or may not share. A total of four participants, including the researcher, will be used for this study. Participation will require a total of five to ten hours of your time during the course of six months.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer open-ended questions regarding your relationship to the autoethnographer and various historical and family events during the decades that span your connection to Marie Bruner. Your interview(s) will be videotaped and you will have the opportunity to read the transcripts prior to inclusion within the study. You may withdraw your participation from the study at any time. The interviews will take place at your convenience in a location that is comfortable for you since the interviews will be videotaped. Some of the questions that you may be asked during the interview will include, but are not limited to:

(1) Describe your relationship to Marie Castro Bruner.
(2) How would you describe Marie's race and heritage? Be as detailed as possible.
(3) Describe any event(s) connected to Marie that involved race in which you felt comfortable or uncomfortable. Please explain.
(4) How would you describe the relationship between Marie's parents? Did race or ethnicity play a role in this relationship?
(5) What family events can you remember had racial overtones?
(6) How did you meet your spouse? Was race a consideration when you thought about who to marry?
(7) Do you think race and/or language was a factor in Marie's upbringing? Please explain.

III. Risks:

There is the possibility that participation in this study may cause you emotional stress since it will exist online. Due to the autoethnographic nature of the study, there will be no anonymity and your identity will be fully revealed. Please be aware that this study is being presented from the viewpoint of the researcher and, although she does not wish to cause any hurt feelings, there may be disagreement about recollection and impact of events since the study is highly personal in nature. You will have to be open about your feelings as the study develops to avoid interpersonal conflict.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally because you may gain understanding regarding multiracial identity development. Overall, I hope to gain understanding about how my multiracial identity developed and share my awareness in an online arena in hopes of creating empathy with readers within and outside the academy. In particular, participation in this study may assist others in understanding the situations and events that marginalize others due to Latino connections. Hopefully, what is shared within this study will cause readers to empathize with multiracial individuals as well as impact change toward those with Latino heritage.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

Due to the personal nature of this study, your identity will not be confidential in nature. Additionally, online presence via a website designed to accompany this study means that you will have to consent to full disclosure and be aware that you will be identified personally. Your consent to participate in this study means that you are aware that your identity will be disclosed online and you do not have a problem with the presence of your videotaped interview on the website.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Marie Bruner at 678-717-7046 and mariecbruner@gmail.com if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to participate in this research, please sign below

_____	_____
Participant	Date
_____	_____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent	Date