RHETORIC, IDENTITY AND THE OBAMA RACIAL PHENOMENON: EXPLORING OBAMA’S TITLE AS THE “FIRST BLACK PRESIDENT”

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Communications.

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DEDICATION

To my beloved family and dear friends

In loving memory of LaRue Beard
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to my parents, Pamela Waddle and Michael Cole, for disregarding racial prejudices by becoming involved in an interracial relationship during a time of racial turmoil. Your strength and courage to miscegenate reformed historical racial portrayals and stereotypes and paved the way for individuals such as myself to proudly claim a Biracial identity in America.

Thanks to my companion and future husband, Brendt Winn II, for pushing me to strive for excellence while understanding and accepting my journey along the way.

Thanks to my mentors Deborah Ballard-Reisch, Dawn Pleas-Bailey, and Tracy Frederick for their many years of time, direction, patience, selflessness, and support. You have helped shape me into the woman I am today. Thanks for helping me on my journey to finding my identity and purpose. I hope that I can follow in your footsteps by impacting and touching lives in the future.
ABSTRACT

In 2008, a nearly 200 year U.S. historical precedent was overturned when Barack Obama was named the “first Black president.” Although Obama is of mixed heritage, he adopted an almost singularly Black identity and has long been characterized by the media as Black. This study is concerned with the role that society and Obama’s acceptance of the title play in identifying and portraying him as the “first Black president.” This study compares Barack Obama’s self-portrayal in his book, *Dreams from my Father*, to mainstream and Black media portrayals of his race. Results track Obama’s self portrayal as Black, mainstream media’s sense-making of his classification as the “first Black president” and Black media’s unquestioned acceptance of the classification.
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INTRODUCTION

From the colonial years to the present day, U.S. society has attempted to categorize Biracial people in America, while researchers and scholars have endeavored to define race. Biracial people (Black/White), historically labeled “mulattos” (Winters & DeBose, 2002), have been variously defined by society, and placed into arbitrary categories, at times separated from the White race, at others, assimilated into the White race (Korgen, 1998). As Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008) note, Biracial individuals are often caught between the two ends of the dominant race continuum. “In the United States, Blacks and Whites continue to be the two groups with the greatest social distance, the most spatial separation, and the strongest historically rooted taboos against interracial marriages” (p. xiii). This dilemma has impacted and continues to impact both the self identifies of Biracial individuals and the social perceptions about such individuals, including portrayals in the mass media. With interracial relationships and Biracial births on the rise (Korgen, 1998) it is becoming increasingly important to unpack the nature and implications of constructions of race for Biracial individuals in the U.S. This study will focus on two primary sites of racial definition, self-portrayals of race by Biracial individuals and mass media portrayals of Biracial individuals.

Due to a wide variety of personal, relational, cultural, structural, and ideological influences, Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) contend that there are many identities that Biracial people choose to adopt, other than Biracial. Some choose to adopt a Singular Identity, choosing to identify themselves as Black or White. Some choose to develop multiple identities and switch from one to the other depending on the context. Some choose to abstain from being placed in any category.
Further, the mass media play a significant role in race portrayals. Due to media influence and power, its racial portrayals can easily affect society’s perceptions of race (West & Turner, 2008). Furthermore, since the media serve a hegemonic cultural function, their inaccurate racial portrayals of Biracial people can be sustained within the culture. Current political dynamics in the U.S. offer a unique opportunity to unpack issues of race in America. In 2008, a nearly 200 year U.S. historical precedent was overturned when Barack Obama was named the “first Black president” (McAuliff, 2008). Obama has adopted an almost singularly Black identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002) and has long been characterized by the media as Black (Essence, 2009). Though Obama identifies himself as Black, his color line consists of a White, Kansas native mother and a Black, Kenyan father. The Obama campaign would not answer when asked why the Biracial candidate calls himself Black (Curl, 2008). In fact, Obama could culturally categorize himself with obvious legitimacy as White—he was, after all, raised by his White mother and White grandparents after his father abandoned the family when he was 2 years old (Curl, 2008). Mixed racial background and cultural upbringing aside Obama has marked history as the “first Black president.” This characterization disregards his mixed ancestry and encourages Biracial (Black/White) people to identify with their Black heritage.

As the popular press attempts to classify Biracial celebrities, the emergence of campus groups, community organizations, political activism, and academic research on Biracial Americans has led to what some now call the “mixed-race movement” (Nakashima, 1996). These scholars and professionals have tried to tackle the issue of the inaccurate media depictions of Obama’s race. Karen Hunter, reader representative for The Hartford Courant, addressed the sensitive issue of why the media refer to Obama as Black rather than Biracial. She asserted, “The Associated Press plays a key role in how the newspapers present the candidates” (Hunter, 2008).
Mike Silverman, the African American Senior Managing Editor, replied, “I would say the answer has to do partly with the way Obama has defined himself and partly with the way American society defines someone who is Biracial” (Curl, 2008). Because a Biracial man has been classified as the “first Black president”, this study is concerned with the role that the mainstream media and Obama’s self portrayal play this identification. This study further examines the societal norm that a Biracial person can only be a member of one racial group (Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008). With the emergence of the mixed-race movement (Nakashima, 1996), increasing attention is paid to issues of identity for mixed-race people. This chapter begins with the definitions of key terms, followed by a review of the history of racial classification in the U.S., then identification and analysis of scholarly research on society’s portrayal of mixed-race people and concludes with a summary of research questions designed to deconstruct President Obama and the media portrayal of him as the “first Black president”.

Definitions

There are basically two schools of thought regarding race, those who argue that race is a social construction and those who argue that race is a biological reality. From the first perspective, race is no more than a political construct and an extension of Western racism necessitated by colonialism (Blauner, 1972). From the second perspective, race is a concentration of gene frequencies that manifest as physiological traits, such as skin color and hair texture (Hall, 2000).

For the purpose of this study, it is crucial to define the terms *mulatto* or *Biracial*, *multiracial*, and *miscegenation*. These adjectives denote people whose genealogical ancestry was understood as combining distinct races regardless of whether this mixture stemmed from their parents’ generation or farther back (Winters & DeBose, 2002). More specifically, the terms
mulatto or Biracial, which directly pertain to this study, are defined as having Black and White ancestry (Winters & DeBose, 2002). According to Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008), multiracial can narrowly be defined as individuals who have one self-identifying Black biological parent and one self-identifying White biological parent. Additionally, the term can be defined as the myriad other potential and different racial combinations (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). Miscegenation, which is the mixing of races, has occurred in the U. S. ever since individuals from African and European populations have had contact with each other (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008).
CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Racial Classification in History

1619-1776: The Colonial Years

According to Korgen (1998), for many years, Black and White servants were treated with equal harshness under the law in the United States. “The first colonists did not have conceptions of White and Black” (Bennett, 1987, p. 40) and “society was divided merely between servants and masters” (Korgen, 1998, p. 10). However, eventually the two groups were distinguished from each other, and while White harsh labor continued, Black labor transformed into slavery (Korgen, 1998). According to Russell, Wilson and Hall (1992), Blacks were viewed as the only non-Christians, and thus, as inferior to White Englishmen who were kept separated. Consequently, it was frowned upon, if there were sexual interactions between the races. In 1622, Virginia declared that “sex with Negroes was equivalent to bestiality” (Russell et al., 1992, p. 13) or having sex with an animal.

Categorization of the offspring of interracial unions became a social issue. Most Biracial children were born to a White father and a Black slave mother. The Virginia Assembly declared in 1662 that “Biracial children of slave women were also categorized as slaves” (Williamson, 1980, p. 7). On the contrary, Biracial children with a White mother and Black father created a different problem. These White women endured severe punishments. In the late 1600’s a White woman who gave birth to a Biracial child was fined and endured years of forced servitude (Korgen, 1998). According to Bennett (1987), between 1691 and 1725, six of the original thirteen colonies, “Virginia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Carolina, Delaware, and Pennsylvania established anti-miscegenation laws” (p. 301). Consequently, “free White men and
women who married Blacks were fined, jailed or reduced to servitude; free Blacks who stepped across the color line were reduced to slavery or sold out of the colonies” (Korgen, 1998, p. 11). Ministers who performed interracial marriages were required to pay fines (Bennett, 1987).

In pursuing the goal to distinguish between Whites and Blacks, free Biracial individuals were gradually stripped of their rights in the late 1600s and early 1700s (Korgen, 1998). By 1723, the Virginia Assembly took away the rights of Biracial people to vote; similar legislation was adopted by the rest of the colonies (Korgen, 1998). However, in spite of great efforts to prevent miscegenation “records indicate that there were approximately 60,000 Biracial individuals in the former colonies by the end of the Revolutionary War” (Reuter, 1969, p. 112).

1776-1850: Pre Civil War Era

By the first decade of the 19th century, slavery was legally prohibited in the Northern states (Korgen, 1998). Consequently, “it became difficult to distinguish between free Blacks and slaves. Most states in the upper South drew definitions similar to Virginia’s which declared in 1785 that a Negro is ‘a person with a Black parent or grandparent’” (Williamson, 1980, p. 13). In 1850, “the upper South had approximately 200,000 Biracial people, while only about 90,000 Biracial people lived in the lower South” (Spickard, 1989, p. 247). Free mixed people in the upper South were primarily the offspring of the lower class. Due to this classification, “they were treated by most members of White society as if they were Black and tended to be marginalized both economically and legally” (Korgen, 1998, p. 13). In contrast, in the lower South, “the lightest and the brightest, Biracial individuals lived very well—nearly on par with their White neighbors, to whom they were tied by bonds of kinship and culture” (Williamson, 1980, p. 14-15). Many Biracial people took advantage of their status to achieve financial gain and some
degree of social prominence (Korgen, 1998). In fact, “some mixed-race families ran plantations and were slave owners themselves” (Zack, 1993, p. 81).

This assimilation into the dominant White culture made it harder to determine in what category to place Biracial individuals. William Harper, a South Carolina judge, stated, “the condition of the individual is not to be determined solely by distinct and visible mixture of negro blood, but by reputation, by his reception into society, and his having commonly exercised the privileges of a White man” (Korgen, 1998, p. 14). Therefore, if any Biracial person adopted the dominant culture’s way of life, she/he would be pronounced as White.

The domestic slave trade began to bloom, with the importation of slaves by the Slave Act of 1807 and the spread of slavery due to the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 (Korgen, 1998). Hence, “it was the increasing supported notion of the genetic differences between Blacks and Whites which made slavery ethically, as well as economically, defensible” (Korgen, 1998, p. 15). Furthermore, “the development of scientific racism in the nineteenth century led to the further denigration of Blacks and extreme White opposition to interracial relationships” (Kinney, 1985, p. 21). As a result, Biracial people were no longer viewed as nearly White; rather they were associated with “physical debility, mental inferiority, and moral degeneracy” (Zack, 1993, p. 122). The intention of these efforts was to affirm that Biracial people were genetically inferior to Whites, and that they were no longer allies of Whites. According to Korgen (1998), “Biracial persons began to be looked upon with increasing disdain and disgust” (p. 16). Consequently, as a last resort, “Biracial people began to identify and start an alliance with Blacks, although they regarded themselves as superior to them” (Korgen, 1998, p. 16).
1850-1910 Lost Between Two Races

After the passing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, societies were formed in which only those light enough to pass were accepted. It became important for Biracial people to separate themselves once again from Blacks. Frazier (1965) asserts, “Although they were not White, they could thank God that they were not Black” (p. 117). However, the fate of the former slaves was sealed after a political revival of 1876 under the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes. White America formed a coalition with plantation owners to keep Black America in the southern cotton fields as sharecroppers. As per Korgen (1998), “As Reconstruction ended and restrictions on all those with any African heritage became increasingly severe, the former distinction between Blacks and Biracial individuals was blurred” (p. 17). Gradually, “those of mixed racial background came to understand that, no matter how brown instead of Black they appeared, they would always be seen as Black by the White population” (Korgen, 1998, p. 17). This idea was a result of the historical one-drop rule.

The One-Drop Rule

This rule posits that any trace of African heritage in an individual makes them Black. The one-drop rule emerged in the 1600s to ensure that mixed-race persons remained in slavery (Winters & DeBose, 2002). Hence, some scholars say the one-drop rule is a warped legacy of slavery, devised to ensure that the offspring of slaves and masters would remain enslaved (Leland & Beals, 1997). As the Civil War approached, White southerners became more defensive in support of slavery and the one-drop rule. Simultaneously, a lack of trust developed towards free Mulattos, which shifted their relationship. The severed ties between Whites sent free Mulattos seeking alliances with Blacks and shifted their sense of identity accordingly (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002).
At times, it was hard to determine to which racial group a person belonged. According to Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002), though it was considered criminal fraud around 1880 to 1965, identity switching made it difficult to follow the one-drop rule. In the early 1800s, if any mixed-race or Black person could pass as White they would in order to reap the rewards of prosperity and avoid discrimination. **Passing** refers to the practice of crossing the socially constructed color line to live as a White person, an option only available to Mulattos or African Americans with physical features that would allow them to be identified as White (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Sweet (2005) believes that this color line permeability was comprised of two characteristics. “The first is made up of children with at least one Black parent who, even as infants or toddlers, are assigned to the White endogamous group by their families and by mainstream society” (p. 187). The second component consists of young adults with at least one Black parent who reject their families’ designations and reinvent themselves as White when starting adult life on their own (Sweet, 2005). The costs of “passing,” however, were high, including emotional stress from cutting ties to the family, condemnation from some segments of the Black community, and the constant fear of being discovered by Whites (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Some states, such as Louisiana and North Carolina, rigorously followed the one-drop concept and defined being Black as having one Black great-great grandparent (Spickard, 1992). By the 1920s the African American community could be viewed as a predominantly mixed-race group. Yet, due to the legal implementation of “one-drop,” during the enactment of Jim Crow laws, the number of Biracial individuals was historically suppressed (Williams, 1996).
The Jim Crow Years

According to Moore (2008), discrimination against Black Americans gained legal support with the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision, which established the legality of ‘‘separate but equal’’ public facilities for Blacks and Whites. As the distinctions among races became socially and legally accepted, the need to distinguish clearly between Black and White Americans was necessary (Moore, 2008). Korgen (1998) states, “With the emphasis on the one-drop rule and clear social and legal distinctions made between Blacks and Whites, there was little social interaction between White and Black Americans” (p. 19). Consequently, interracial sexual contacts significantly decreased (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Essentially, Biracial children were not accepted at all by their White families. According to Spickard (1992), “Almost none of more than 300 Chicago mulattoes Robert Roberts (1989) interviewed in the 1930s, ‘40s, ‘50s had ever enjoyed a close relationship with her or his White grandparents, and most had no such relationship at all” (p. 330). For many Biracial children, “the White side of their extended family either completely abandoned them or functioned merely as a painful reminder of racial division and disharmony within the family” (Korgen, 1998, p. 20).

Korgen (1998) asserts, “While society continued its preoccupation with racial boundary maintenance, mulattoes remained full members of the Black community” (p. 7). “Biracial individuals were well regarded by both Blacks and Whites—Blacks made them their leaders and Whites accepted them as Black leaders” (Zack, 1993, p. 114). “Both Blacks and Whites viewed Biracial people as the natural leaders of the Black community” (Korgen, 1998, p. 18). The complete identification of Biracial people with the Black community was further illustrated in the Harlem Renaissance of 1923-1930 (Korgen, 1998, p. 18), for example, Langston Hughes and Zora Neal Hurston, who were Biracial were regarded as Black artists.
1960-present The Emergence of Multiculturalism

The system of institutionalized segregation was ultimately overturned by a series of Supreme Court decisions and new laws, beginning with the 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* which abolished the “separate but equal” doctrine in public schools. This decision was followed by the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act in 1965, the *Loving vs. the Commonwealth of Virginia* case which struck down laws prohibiting interracial marriages, and legislative protections against housing discrimination in 1968. These acts ultimately tore down barriers for Blacks and legally reaffirmed rights. However, they did not provide instant social integration (Korgen, 1998, p. 8). The deep South delayed or slowly initiated the demands to desegregate until the Supreme Court mandated in 1969 *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* that no further delays in the desegregation of schools would be tolerated and that Southern schools must draft realistic plans for desegregation immediately (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002, p. 8).

During this time, Blacks united and “Black pride” and “Black power” emerged in the late 1960s. In this emotional climate of racial polarization, Biracial individuals, who had led the earlier renaissance, were stigmatized and experienced negative treatment (Korgen, 1998, p. 8). The more the country focused on the race problem, the more deeply Americans viewed race as an absolute biological—as opposed to a socially constructed—reality and the more unquestioned the one-drop rule became (Korgen, 1998, p. 8-9).

Multiculturalism was born throughout the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s as a result of the Black liberation movement, the women’s movement, the lesbian and gay movements, and other interest groups that embraced identity (Korgen, 1998). Noted psychologists and psychiatrists have come
to the opinion that “for a person of a mixed ancestry to neglect one or the other parent’s identity is to detract from a clear racial identity” (Korgen, 1998, p. 22). According to Spickard (1989), “Biracial support groups came into existence in the early 1980s on the explicit premise that both Black and non-Black identities are necessary to the well-being of both interracial marriages and their offspring” (p. 339). “The result is that Biracial Americans no longer have an obvious racial identity” (Korgen, 1998, p. 22). This non-obvious racial categorization can also be seen in the U.S Census Bureau’s historical classifications of race.

**U.S. Census Bureau**

The racial categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau are based on socially determined ideas of race; underscoring the fact that race is a social construction rather than a biologically based reality (Moore, 2008). These racial categorizations have sparked controversy among multiracial populations across America. The social conception of race is apparent throughout historical definitions and racial categories on the U.S. Census. As per Nakashima (1992), “If a multiracial person identifies with multiple racial groups, the monoracially ‘hegemonic’ American culture is forced either to adjust the system to make room for the person or to adjust the person to fit into the system” (p. 5). The following table shows a chronological perspective of how census categories for race have shifted.

**Census of 1790-2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790-1820</td>
<td>“Free White males and females” “Slaves” “All other free persons, except Indians, not taxed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>“Foreigners not naturalized” was added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>“All other free persons, except Indians, not taxed” was dropped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>“White,” “Free Black,” “Free Mulatto,” “Slave Black,” and “Slave Mulatto” were added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>“Slave Black” and “Slave Mulatto” were removed and “Indian” and “Chinese” were added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>“Japanese” was added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>“Quadroon” (one-quarter Black) and “Octoroon” (from any trace to one-eighth Black) were added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>“Quadroon” (one-quarter Black) and “Octoroon” (from any trace to one-eighth Black) were dropped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>“Other” was added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>All mulatto categories were dropped. Other Asian groups and “Mexican” categories were added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>An unsuccessful attempt was made for the first time to identify individuals of mixed American Indian, Black, and White ancestry living in certain communities in the eastern United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 and 1990</td>
<td>A standard set of expanded race categories was used for all states. The Asian and Pacific Islander race category was used for the first time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2000       | “Hispanic or Latino” or “Not Hispanic or Latino” and the multi-selection option were added as ethnicity options “Hispanic or Latino” was removed from the race category Respondents could choose one or more of the following racial categories:  
  • White  
  • Black, African American, or Negro  
  • American Indian or Alaska Native  
  • Asian Indian  
  • Chinese  
  • Filipino  
  • Japanese  
  • Korean |
Clearly, understandings of race and the racial choices deemed necessary on the U.S. Census have changed in relation to the political power of the different racial groups in the U.S., the discrimination they face, and the changing demographic characteristics of the nation’s population (Moore, 2008). Changes such as the “check all that apply” option for reporting race in the U.S. Census suggest that the notion of hypodescent, assigning Biracial children to the inferior race, is considered outmoded (Brunsma, 2006). However, anecdotal evidence indicates that multiracial people still encounter mono-racial categorizations (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Adding the option in 2000 to “check all that apply” is one step forward in properly categorizing multiracial people. However, as Winters and DeBose, (2003) conclude, “Until such time as a federal multiracial category is actually established, however, celebrations over people finally being able to proclaim their multiraciality are simply premature” (p. 109).

**Racial Classification in Today’s Society**

A 2008 study conducted by Peery and Bodenhausen, addressed how Biracial people are socially categorized. It was hypothesized that biological cues would have more impact on social categorization than cultural cues; two experiments were conducted. Racially ambiguous target faces were presented alongside biological, cultural, or both biological and cultural information reflecting a mixed-race background. In the first experiment, 59 non-Black undergraduates made quick judgments about whether 16 subjects were Black/not Black, White/not White, both or
neither after studying their profiles. Subject profiles included information about their demographic, cultural, and biological backgrounds. In experiment two, 47 undergraduates first typed their own racial descriptions of the subjects and then selected “Black,” “White,” “Multiracial,” or “none of the above.” The results of both experiments showed that when a person is described as multiracial, it is more likely that the subject is categorized as Black. The hypothesis was confirmed in that biological cues exert more consistent influence on racial categorizations than do cultural cues.

Traditionally, it has been Black communities that have embraced Biracial children as their own rather than White (Socha & Diggs, 1999). Legal definitions notwithstanding, history demonstrates that children of Black-White heritage identified with and became part of larger African American communities much more readily than they did European-American ones (Orbe & Strother, 1996). Davis (1991) estimated that two in three African Americans have mixed racial ancestry, much of which is visible in the great diversity of physical features among those of African descent (Morganthau, 1995). In fact, Davis (1991) asserted that many of the nation’s Black leaders have been of predominately White ancestry, and cited formidable leaders such as the antebellum African American abolitionist, Robert Puvis, the American civil rights activists, W.E.B. Du Bois, NAACP executive secretary, Walter White, and African American civil rights leader, A. Philip Randolph.

Many parents of Biracial children raise their children as Black with little or no attention to their White ancestry. According to Socha & Diggs (1999), the rationale behind interracial families embracing the Black experience can be summarized by the following three ideas: First, parents believe it is important to prepare children for interactions in a society that will define them as Black regardless of their appearance. Jones (1996) simply stated, “My mixed-race
children were Black on their own and at their own peril, on the street, in school, in America’” (p. 206). Although many interracial couples would prefer otherwise, the larger society still sees their children as Black, thus, in order to assist in their survival/success, having a Black identity is seen as the only option (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). Second, this approach allows Biracial children to benefit from the strength of African American communities (Rosenblatt et al, 1995). In this regard, the identity of being Black provides an individual with a “large, identifiable, culturally defined group with which to affiliate” (Rosenblatt et al, 1995, p. 208). Historically, the same has not been true for adopting a bi-multiethnic identity (Socha & Diggs, 1999).

Third, Biracial families see the Black experience in this country as positive, affirming, and inspiring (Jones, 1996). In this regard, parents seek to expose their families to the many historical and contemporary accomplishments of African Americans in politics, literature, business, education, and the arts (Socha & Diggs, 1999). By embracing their African heritage, children are able to have a strong sense of self. In contrast, Biracial persons who seek to affirm their mixed ancestry are seen as attempting to identify with the privilege of the dominant culture and downplay their African heritage (Marriott, 1996).

According to Hall (2000), “In the interest of mental and emotional health, Americans who perceive themselves as Biracial must counter-define the social and political universe”; in the face of two powerful barriers—racism and culture—this characterizes the viability of their existence (p. 91). Sociologists of cultural diversity stress the process of self-acknowledgement and the proclamation of existence as the first critical step in personal and, later, social acceptance of what is different (Long, 1991).

As pertains to Biracial Americans, traces of African blood necessitate their status as “minorities” (Kitano, 1997). Having Black lineage is their most potent and salient feature
because it contrasts with the Western ideal (Hall, 1990). African blood may have an effect upon every phase of life, including self-concept and identity (Owusu, 1994). It is a “master status” which differentiates the race category of Africans from the mainstream as an inferior element of society (Garcia & Swenson, 1992; Hernstein & Murray, 1994).

Biracial people face a great deal of discrimination from European Americans who perceive them as being too Black and from African Americans who believe they aren’t Black enough (Socha & Diggs, 1999). Thus, a Biracial individual is socially or culturally positioned between two racial groups. Hundreds of articles, blogs, etc. appear on Google, if “Is Obama Black Enough” is searched. In a survey conducted by Korgen (1998), 204 college students responded to the following question: Should those who have both an African American and a White parent be racially classified as (a) White, (b) Black, or (c) Biracial? If the participants were unsure which to circle, they wrote the reason for their uncertainty. Seventy-four percent said Biracial, 4.4 percent said Black, 8.8 percent refused to answer saying the person should choose for him/herself, 6.3 percent refused to answer on the basis that society should not label people, .09 percent refused to answer saying it depends on the appearance of the individual, and 5.3 percent refused to answer without comment. The ¾ majority view acknowledges that people with a Black and White parent can socially be categorized appropriately. This type of identity choice can also be adopted by the Biracial individual.

**Racial Classification of the Self**

Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008) contend that there are multiple ways Biracial people (Black/White) interpret and respond to their own identities. In-depth interviews and surveys were conducted, in order to identify individuals’ racial self-understandings. Phase 1 of the study involved interviews with 14 Biracial undergraduates at a Midwest university. The interview
study provided a framework from which a survey was produced and distributed in Phase 2. Two hundred fifty respondents for the second phase were drawn from Metro Community College and Urban University in the Detroit metropolitan area. Results from the survey in Phase 2 were then clarified in Phase 3 through purposive interviewing. Phase 3 consisted of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 25 participants. The questions inquired about the racial composition of the respondent’s social networks, early childhood experiences, interactions with different racial groups, parental socialization, experiences of discrimination, and group evaluations of both Blacks and Whites.

Their data suggest descriptive categories for the ways that Black/White multiracial people understand their Biracialism: 1) Border Identity, 2) Singular Identity, 3) Protean Identity, and/or 4) a Transcendent Identity. Border Identity was the most common category of understanding the self. About 58 percent of those surveyed defined their racial identity as neither exclusively Black nor White, but instead, as a third and separate category that draws from characteristics of both of these groups and has some additional uniqueness in its combination. In the Singular Identity, an individual’s racial identity is exclusively either Black or White, and is based on historical norms and associated with the one-drop rule. About 13 percent of the sample considered themselves exclusively Black, and almost 4 percent considered themselves exclusively White. Four socialization and contextual variables were found to influence the choice of this identity option: 1) social network composition, 2) family discussion about being multiracial, 3) experiencing negative treatment from Whites, and 4) geographic region. A Protean Identity is the ability of a Biracial person to cross boundaries between Black, White, and Biracial, which is possible because they possess Black, White, and Biracial identities. These individuals shift their identities according to the racial context that they are experiencing.
Individuals are able to identify, function and feel equally comfortable in both racial groups. The Transcendent Identity posits that a Biracial person consciously denies having any racial identity whatsoever. These individuals completely opt out of racial categorization. Individuals who possess this type of identity do not use race as a construct to understand the social world or their place in it.

A commonsense approach was discussed, in that one factor influencing Biracial people’s identity choice is appearance. Hence, the link between appearance and identity leads many people to assume that: 1) multi-racials who have dark skin will identify exclusively as Black; 2) those who have light skin will choose a Biracial identity; and 3) those who appear White will identify as White. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2008) concluded that what it means to be Biracial is conceptually complex and varies among Biracial respondents. A Biracial person’s self-identity is impacted by experiences, biographies, and cultural contexts. The data suggest there is no single understanding among Black/White Biracial people as to what Biracial identity means or how it translates into an individual self-understanding.

In summary, the one-drop rule still seems to be a factor in determining race. Both Black and White races appear to be the primary social influence when categorizing Biracial people. Though this categorization exists, it can be a struggle for a Biracial individual to be fully accepted in either race. At times, they are culturally positioned between these two races and are more often than not identified as either Black or “Biracial.” Relatively, there are many ways that a Biracial person can self-identify. However, most Biracial people (58 percent) choose to adopt a “Border Identity,” and view themselves as a third and separate entity that draws from the other two racial categories. Thus, these individuals choose to be labeled as “Biracial,” on the racial
continuum. In considering the societal and self-portrayals of Biracial people, we take a further look at the media’s role and influence in this racial phenomenon.

**Mass Media and Social Impact**

The mass media, particularly the electronic media of television and radio, are the linchpins of the collective and individual everyday aesthetic lives of the vast majority of families in the U.S. Television, more than any other form, is now an intimate party of U.S family life. It was reported in 2006, that the average household has more television sets than people. Statistics show that there are 2.73 television sets in the typical home and 2.55 people (USA Today, 2006). “In the average home, a television set is turned on for more than a third of the day—eight hours, 14 minutes” (USA Today, 2006). Almost every family has at least one television set that is typically operated from 4 to 7 hours a day (Andreasen, 1994). The phenomena of television content and the ways in which families integrate the form and content in their daily lives and meaning systems become central concerns for the study of everyday family life (Alexander, 1994). Consequently, if the media refer to Biracial people as Black, the public may be influenced by this approach to labeling people of mixed-race. Though it can be argued that the media is a reflection of society, the media decides which parts of society to reflect, which in turn defines and creates a hegemonic position.

The growing number of Biracial children and adults in the United States, 6, 571, 705 in recent census estimates (U.S Census Bureau, 2006-2008) has also led to an increase in dialogue about mixed-race issues in both academia and the mainstream media (Streeter, 1996). With entertainers such as Mariah Carey and Keanu Reeves and athletes like Tiger Woods, multiracial persons are quickly becoming a much more visible sector of the population (Basu, 2007).
When the media inaccurately portray Biracial people as uni-racial, society is affected. In Stuart Hall’s cultural studies theory (1980), the media represent ideologies of the dominant class in a society. According to West and Turner (2008), ideologies refer to “those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand, and make sense of some aspect of social existence” (p. 392). The media is one of the most influential, powerful social groups in the United States. Since the media represent such a powerful role in society, its biased opinions create viewers that view realities in the same way. Viewers’ realities and opinions on social issues are shaped by the media. According to West and Turner (2008), “the media serve to communicate dominant ways of thinking, regardless of the efficacy of such thinking” (p. 390). Hall believes that the media serve a hegemonic function in society.

With the media taking an active role in defining Biracialism, individuals who hold differing views may be silenced if their self-identities do not match the emerging characterizations. Biracial people may fear being socially isolated; therefore, they may easily conform to what they perceive to be the dominant view as expressed by the media (Noelle-Neumann, 1984). In Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann’s Spiral of Silence theory (1984), “the media focus more on majority views, underestimating the minority views” (West & Turner, 2008, p. 443). Considering the past categorizations of race leading to the media serving a hegemonic cultural function, it is difficult for Biracial people to socially claim their identities and challenge the media portrayals of their race. The following Biracial celebrities have taken different paths to self-identify in the media.
Biracial Celebrities in the Media

Halle Berry, a well-known Biracial actress, won an Academy Award in 2002 for her performance in the movie *Monster’s Ball*. In her acceptance speech, she identified herself as a member of Black America. She claimed that the award was for the successful, well-known Black women that stood beside her, and that it proved that African Americans can be just as successful in the entertainment industry (Berry, 2002). She affirmed that she accepted the award on behalf of all of the members of her “race” who had struggled before her and prepared the way (Sweet, 2005). In essence, she expressed how she had paved the way for future Black entertainers because of the African Americans who had paved the way for her.

On the other hand, Tiger Woods, a popular golfer and athlete, prefers to be identified as multiracial. Woods’ mixed-race heritage includes African American, Caucasian, Asian and Indian. Tiger Woods is one of the 6.8 million Americans currently labeling themselves as Biracial (Morse, 2001). However, it appears that the media are willing to count partial Blackness as being a “Black” golfer (Billings, 2003). Many believe that Wood’s fame stems from his domination in an almost exclusively White sport. Society, which had once classified him as one of the first successful Black golfers, was informed of his preference when Woods informed the press in his only formal statement regarding his race:

My parents have taught me to always be proud of my ethnic background. Please rest assured that is, and always will be, the case, past, present, and future. The various media have portrayed me as African American or sometimes Asian. In fact, I am both… On my father’s side, I am African American. On my mother’s side, I am Thai. Truthfully, I feel very fortunate and equally proud to be both (Rosaforte, 1997, p. 181).
Andrew Billings (2003) evaluated the media depictions of Tiger Woods throughout four major golf tournaments during the 2001 PGA season. A total of 37.5 hours of network golf coverage were videotaped. Two coders located and wrote out 2,989 adjectival descriptors and descriptive phrases that applied to golf coverage of each individual. Of the 1,686 comments that were classified into one of the categories of the taxonomy, 225 were depictions of Woods, while 1,461 were of other golfers. The results of this study showed that Woods was found to have a higher percentage of comments than other golfers regarding explanations for failure. They concluded that Woods is portrayed as displaying stereotypes of Black and White athletes. When Woods was successful, the comments were not consistent with traditional Black stereotypes; however, when Woods struggled he was portrayed in similar ways as other Black athletes. As Billing (2003) states, “He’s only Black when he’s losing” (p. 35).

As the numbers and presence of mixed-race people grow, more and more Biracial Americans are questioning the traditional racial hierarchy in the United States and embracing all sides of their racial heritage (Moore, 2008). This transformation from the one-drop rule to a society in which all aspects of racial heritage are acknowledged and appreciated reveals how definitions of race are continually constructed and reconstructed (Moore, 2008).

**Conclusion**

Drawing on the analysis and arguments from multiple scholars, many portrayals about the identity of Biracial people emerge. Racial identity is not fixed or mutually exclusive, but rests solely on individualistic choices and has structurally and culturally defined parameters (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). The common theme in research studies is that the one-drop rule is a significant factor in socially classifying race (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008 & Korgen, 1998). From this review of literature, it is clear that racial classification has been a
complex, multi-layered process in U. S. history. Standards and classifications as well as their social significance have varied over time as illustrated perhaps most clearly in ever-changing census classifications. The site of current renegotiation of race in the U. S. can perhaps be best seen in recent media portrayals of high profile Biracial individuals who claim and exemplify the fact that there are multiple ways a Biracial person can self-identify. Those in the mixed-race movement prefer that public figures, like President Obama, challenge the limiting classification of Biracial individuals as one race or another and serve as spokespersons for mixed-race classification. President Obama, on the other hand, appears to have adopted a “Singular Identity,” in that he chooses to identity with his Black ancestry as opposed to his White or Biracial lineage.

**Rationale**

In view of past research there are many factors that influence how individuals and society understand Biracial identity in the U. S. This study compares Barack Obama’s self-portrayal in his book, *Dreams from my Father*, Black media, and mainstream media portrayals of his race in order to identify common and unique themes around race and shed light on the question of whether race is viewed as a social, cultural, or physical construct. This study will allow for a better understanding of the framework within which President Obama self identifies, and the U. S media classifies, him as black, thus revealing the cultural tensions among racial stereotypes or classifications.

Based on past research, the following research questions are posited:

RQ1: What unique and shared understandings of racial identity emerge from thematic analysis of media and self portrayals of President Obama as “the first Black president”?
RQ1a: How is President Obama’s racial self portrayal reflected in his book *Dreams from my Father*?

RQ1b: How do mainstream media racially portray President Obama?

RQ1c: How do Black media racially portray President Obama?
CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Obama’s book, *Dreams from my Father* (2004), and 24 articles, published in Black and mainstream media outlets are reviewed and evaluated to unpack the unique and common themes emergent in the current discussion over racial classification. *Dreams from my Father* will be analyzed as it is an autobiography of Obama’s journey to seek his African heritage and find his identity. Excerpts will be compared to Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2008) four identity types for biracial people. Selections of 20 mainstream print media sources and 4 Black magazines have been identified based on circulation. Analysis of Obama’s book will allow for an assessment of his self portrayal. Examination of how Obama is classified in mainstream and Black media articles published up to three months after Election Day will allow for assessment of the coherence and consistency of media portrayals of Obama’s race as well as comparison with Obama’s self portrayal.

**Procedure**

A list from the *State of the News Media* 2008 annual report was used as a sampling frame for Black media. Due to the lack of Black newspapers, 4 magazines that are targeted towards the Black community will be chosen by looking at the highest percent of monthly circulation among Blacks. Top Black newspapers were not included because the magazines had higher circulation rates among African Americans. A list from the *Editor and Publisher* journal was used as a sampling frame for selecting mainstream newspapers. This source provides the top one hundred daily newspapers in the U.S according to circulation in 2008.
A thematic analysis approach was used to search and identify common and unique patterns in self and media portrayals of President Obama’s race. According to Richard Boyatzis (1998), “A theme is a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (p. 4). First, the raw data from the narratives were truncated into important content (Boyatzis, 1998). Every observation that plays a role in determining the driving influence of Obama’s racial portrayal was noted. Any data relevant to his racial categorization was included. More specifically, the primary focus within the articles and narratives was words and phrases describing President Obama’s ethnicity, such as “Black”, “White”, “Biracial”, “African American”, “Caucasian”, etc. Furthermore, statements that generated racial portrayals were also included. These data were organized using an Excel spreadsheet, which listed the source, along with the important data identified, and the number of times an important racial term was used. Obama’s narratives were placed in a Word document and then transferred and organized into an Excel spreadsheet, using the same technique. Second, important themes that emerged from the data were encoded and described (Boyatzis, 1998). Then relevant data was condensed into key themes that encapsulate the research questions posited in this study. Each artifact was first analyzed individually, themes constructed within.

Third, data was analyzed across data sources to identify commonalities and uniquenesses. Theme content was compared with other data types to identify overarching common and unique portrayals of race used both by Obama and the media. Codes were developed by interpreting or making sense of the information, first within, then between data sources (Boyatzis, 1998). Fourth, these interpretations were placed in the context of an emergent conceptual framework (Boyatzis, 1998). Related, disconnected, ambiguous, or distinct ways of describing or
categorizing race that were both explicitly and implicitly fit within or outside the conceptual framework provided insight into the research questions. Themes and information was interpreted and applied to prior research and theory to contribute to the development of knowledge.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

This chapter discusses research results. The aim of this study was to uncover and interpret the media and Obama’s portrayals as the “first Black president”. To unpack this issue one overarching research question was advanced with three sub-questions: What unique and shared understandings of racial identity emerge from thematic analysis of media and self portrayals of President Obama as “the first Black president”?

Codes were developed and analyzed based on each research sub-question and racially constructed words and quotations. Results will be discussed below by research sub-question. Data analysis for RQ1a was inductive and theory-driven. Additionally, data was also analyzed deductively allowing for additional emergent categories. Initially, the code categorizations followed Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2008) 4 identity types (Singular, Protean, Border, Transcendent). Data analysis for RQ1b and RQ1c was deductive and data-driven. Therefore, the code categorizations emerged from portrayals of race reflected in media accounts. After themes were identified, sub-themes were identified and ultimately compared across data types. Linking and analyzing these three research sub-questions illustrated the unique and shared understandings of Biracial identity reflected in both President Obama’s self portrayal and his portrayals in mainstream and Black media, thus addressing the main research question.
Research Sub-Question 1a

RQ1a: How is President Obama’s racial self portrayal reflected in his book *Dreams from my Father*?

In considering RQ1a, Obama’s narratives reflected all four of Rockquemore and Brunsma’s identity types to varying degrees. In addition, a fifth identity type emerged. This identity type is named the *Ambivalent Identity type*. These five racial categorizations are summarized below, including excerpts from Obama’s writings that illustrate each identity choice.

**Border Identity**

This identity type is the most common self portrayal among Biracial individuals (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). The person does not choose to be exclusive to either race; rather s/he draws from the characteristics of both groups, adopting a unique separate identity. This individual usually identifies as Biracial. Although Obama appears to have accepted both races, he personally rejects this identity type.

“They, they, they. That was the problem with people like Joyce [multiracial]. They talked about the richness of their multicultural heritage and it sounded real good, until you noticed that they avoided Black people” (p. 92).

And we the half-breeds and the college-degreed, take a survey of the situation and think to ourselves, Why should we get lumped in with the losers [Blacks] if we don’t have to? We become only so grateful to lose ourselves in the crowd…until we encounter the same racist indignities from White people that the less fortunate coloreds have to put up with…but because we’re wearing a Brooks Brothers suit and speak impeccable English
and yet somehow been mistaken for an ordinary nigger. Don’t you know who I am? I’m an individual (p. 92).

Obama further notes:

The truth was that I understood Joyce, her and all the other black kids who felt the same way. In their mannerisms, their speech, their mixed-up hearts, I kept recognizing pieces of myself. And that’s exactly what scared me. Their confusion made me question my own racial credentials all over again. I needed to put distance between them and myself, to convince myself that I wasn’t compromised—that I was indeed still awake. (p. 92-93)

**Singular Identity**

This racial category posits that the individual exclusively chooses to adopt a Black or White identity choice. This option is linked with the historical one-drop rule and social norms (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). Obama has primarily subscribed to this identity choice. Four socialization and contextual variables are found to influence the choice of this identity option: 1) appearance, 2) social network composition, 3) family discussion about being multiracial, 4) experiencing negative treatment from Blacks or Whites, and 5) geographic region (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). Seven quotations illustrate the emergence of his self portrayal.

**Appearance:**

“Away from my mother, away from my grandparents, I was engaged in a fitful interior struggle. I was trying to raise myself to be a Black man in America, and beyond the given of my appearance, no one around me seemed to know exactly what that meant” (p. 70).

“As far as they [Rafiq and Rev. Smalls] were concerned, my color had always been a sufficient criterion for community membership, enough of a cross to bear” (p. 255).
Geographic Region:

“I was more like the Black students who had grown up in the suburbs, kids whose parents had already paid the price of escape” (p. 91).

“And if I had come to understand myself as a Black American, and was understood as such, that understanding remained unanchored to place” (p. 106).

“In Chicago, I could be a role model, an example, of Black male success” (p. 254).

Negative Treatment from Whites:

While my own upbringing hardly typifies the African American experience…I now occupy a position that insulates me from most of the bumps and bruises that the average Black man must endure. I can recite the usual litany of petty slights that during my 45 years have been directed my way: security guards tailing me as I shop in dept stores, White couples who toss me their car keys as I stand outside a restaurant waiting for the valet, police cars pulling me over for no apparent reason. I know what it’s like to have people tell me I can’t do something because of my color, and I know the bitter swill of swallowed-back anger. (p. 233)

Additional Quotations:

Additional quotations reflect Obama’s singular Black identity but do not clearly fit under any of the subthemes identified by (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008).

I had stumbled upon one of the well-kept secrets about Black people: that most of us weren’t interested in revolt; that most of us tired of thinking about race all the time; that if we preferred to keep to ourselves it was mainly because that was the easiest way to
stop thinking about it, easier than spending all your time mad or trying to guess whatever it was that White folks were thinking about you. (p. 91)

“I was living out a caricature of Black male adolescence, itself a caricature of swaggering American manhood” (p. 74).

**Protean Identity**

The individual possesses the ability to comfortably cross boundaries or shift identities according to the racial context in which they find themselves (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). Obama makes only one statement that could be characterized from this perspective.

“As it was, I learned to slip back and forth between my Black and White worlds, understanding that each possessed its own language and customs and structures of meaning, convinced that with a bit of translation on my part the two worlds would eventually cohere” (p. 76).

**Transcendent Identity**

This identity option asserts that the individual views him/herself as a human, and denies having any racial identity whatsoever (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). Obama makes only one statement that can be listed under the Transcendent Identity type.

“But at the age of five or six I was satisfied to leave these distant mysteries intact…That my father looked nothing like the people around me—that he was Black as pitch, my mother White as milk—barely registered in my mind” (p.10).

In addition to Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2008) initial categorizations, a fifth racial classification emerged in Obama’s self portrayal; Ambivalent Identity.
Ambivalent Identity

This categorization emerged from Obama’s writings in a way unique from the other categorizations. Obama talked about his uncertainty and inability at times to understand his own self-identity. These comments demonstrate his discomfort in situations that caused him to feel not fully accepted by either race. These quotations indicate that Obama, at times, felt lost, stuck between the social distance, spatial separation, and racial tension of the two groups.

White folks. The term itself was uncomfortable in my mouth at first; I felt like non-native speaker tripping over a difficult phrase…Sometimes I would find myself talking about White folks this or White folks that, and I would suddenly remember my mother’s smile and the words I spoke would seem awkward and false. (p. 75)

“I was different, after all, potentially suspect; I had no idea who my own self was. Unwilling to risk exposure, I would quickly retreat to safer ground” (p. 76).

“Information—what city please? “uh…I’m not sure. I was hoping you could tell me. The name’s Obama. Where do I belong?” (p. 105).

Theme in Obama’s racial self portrayal

Theme 1: Obama’s Singular Identity

Based on Obama’s self-portrayal in his autobiography, he appeared to adopt a Singular Identity, although he ultimately crosses between this and the Ambivalent Identity types. Obama has searched for indicators of his belonging, which left him to feel more of an attachment to his Black side due to his life experiences and cultural upbringing. A Singular Identity includes self-identifying as either Black or White. Obama consistently expresses this identity choice by portraying himself as Black. Although Obama acknowledges his Biracial ancestry, he relates more to what it means to be Black and how Blacks are treated in this culture. Although, he does
make comments that subscribe to the other identity types, he labels himself at all times as a Black man. His reality is viewed through the lens of a Black man, who is Biracial.

Research Sub-Question 1b

RQ1b: How do mainstream media racially portray President Obama?

This research question was approached in a deductive and data-driven manner. In analyzing 20 lead stories from national newspapers, themes centered on the racial portrayals of Obama’s historical election into office surfaced. Three themes emerged across articles: 1) Identifying Obama as Black while acknowledging his Biracial lineage, 2) Obama’s election as indication of a post-racial future, and 3) Obama as beneficiary of the efforts of Black forefathers. Table 1, located in the appendix, shows sub-themes that surfaced from the newspaper portrayals of Obama’s race, along with whether or not each article contained comments relating to that sub-theme. These sub-themes emerged within each data source and were compared across data sources. The following themes are based on clustering article reasoning around categorization of Obama as “the first Black president.”

Theme 1: Identifying Obama as Black while acknowledging his Biracial lineage.

Although Obama has a White, Kansas native mother and Kenyan father, he is primarily portrayed by mainstream media newspapers as Black. All 20 articles named Obama the “first African American president” (13 articles), or the “first Black president” (12 articles). Thirteen of the twenty articles identified Obama as a Black man. Twelve of the articles identified him as an African American. Five of the articles identified him as Black and African American. Ten of the articles identified him as Black or African American and recognized his Biracial heritage. Ten articles either asserted that his parents were interracially married or mentioned his parents’ ethnicities: White mother and Kenyan father. The following two excerpts list Obama as Biracial,
using different tactics by acknowledging him as Biracial without including his parents’ ethnicities.

MM 6: “He carved out a broad base and he successfully cast himself as a man of his time, a Biracial bridge-builder, not tied to the divisive politics of the past” (Henderson & Gordon, 2008).

MM 18: Adam Bradley states, “And in a sense it is, a start to potentially a new era in politics—one that gives us a multiracial president for a multiracial democracy. To me, it’s the meeting of the man and the moment. 'Bradley, who, like Obama is Biracial’” (Merida, 2008).

The following excerpts express how the media further identified Obama as Black.

**Obama is the first**

MM 11: “Obama is a man of firsts—the first African American nominee for president, the first Black commander in chief—and an inspiration to those who historically have been denied citizenship’s full blessings” (Turner, 2008).

MM 3: “Obama is not the first Black American capable of being president; he’s the first Black American who got the chance to prove it” (Dyson, 2008).

**Obama is Black**

MM 4: “Obama is what I have called a “bargainer”—a Black who says to Whites, “I will never presume that you are racist if you will not hold my race against me” (Steele, 2008).

MM 3: “Obama is not a Black president, but a president who’s Black” (Dyson, 2008).

MM 3: “But the real miracle may be that Obama’s presidency persuades Americans to take for granted that a talented Black person, if trusted can do a great deal of good for the country” (Dyson, 2008).
MM 2: “Early poll returns showed a large lead for the African American candidate, one whose face and words have come to define not just an election but a time in history” (Parsons, 2008).

MM 14: “In a New York/CBS News poll conducted in late October, Obama supporters were more likely than McCain voters to say they knew someone who was not supporting Mr. Obama because he is Black. McCain backers were more likely than Obama supporters to say they knew someone who was supporting him because he is Black” (Zernike & Sussman, 2008).

**Theme 2: Obama’s election as indication of a post-racial future**

Three sub-themes emerge within this theme: 1) Progress in overcoming racial oppression, 2) Obama’s election had nothing to do with race; 3) Obama’s election indicates a decline in racial tension. Six of the articles express a belief in a post-racial future.

**Progress in overcoming racial oppression**

MM 2: “Obama wasn’t even in grade school when the Supreme Court banished laws forbidding the marriage of Whites and Blacks” (Parsons, 2008).

MM 13: “People rolled spontaneously into the streets to celebrate what many described, with perhaps overstated if understandable exhilaration, a new era in a country where just 143 years ago, Mr. Obama, as a Black man, could have been owned as a slave” (Nagourney, 2008).

MM 18: “With the election of its first Black president, it can now begin to erase one of the stains on that reputation, one that repeatedly shamed us in front of other countries” (Merida, 2008).
MM 19: “His improbable personal journey is inextricably intertwined with the nation’s long, bloody road to racial equality” (USA Today, 2008).

**Obama’s election indicates a decline in racial tension**

MM 3: “Obama need not cease being a Black man to govern effectively, but America must overcome its brutal racist past to permit his gifts, and those of other Blacks to shine” (Dyson, 2008).

MM 11: “Race is just not going to be an issue overall in society. It feels good to know we’re freeing generations to come from having to deal with those problems. That’s a real good feeling” (Turner, 2008).

MM 18: “There’s been a decided shift in the meaning of race. It’s not an ending. It’s a beginning” (Merida, 2008).

**Theme 3: Obama as beneficiary of the efforts of Black forefathers**

It is a recurring theme that Black leaders throughout history paved the way for Obama’s presidency. Prominent Black leaders who experienced segregation, racial tension, and oppression fought to pass laws to gain equality for Black people. Two sub-themes emerge: 1) Identification of the contributions of specific Black leaders who led the way for Obama and 2) Specific historical events indicating a trajectory of progress toward racial equality. Nine of the articles mention several Black leaders who made their voices heard to end the racial divide. Twelve of the articles include references to historical events that show the dissolve of racial divisions and constructs.
Identification of the contributions of specific Black leaders who led the way for Obama

MM 3: “A President Obama would not have come to be without the groundbreaking efforts of Shirley Chisholm, and especially Jesse Jackson” (Dyson, 2008).

Obama is likewise the beneficiary of Frederick Douglass’ eloquence and sense of struggle, Booker T. Washington’s self-reliant uplift, W.E.B. Du Bois’ brilliant unmasking of racial hierarchy, Mary McLeod Bethune’s imperishable desire for education, Ella Baker’s tactical and strategic energy, Malcolm X’s will to literary reinvention and Martin Luther King Jr.’s soaring oratory and ultimate sacrifice. (Dyson, 2008).

MM 2: An anonymous Black Chicago man stated, “Rosa Parks sat down. Martin Luther King marched. Barack Obama ran. And my grandchildren will fly” (Parsons, 2008).

The prior two quotations and the three that follow specifically within this sub-theme reference Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s efforts. The following excerpts show that his dream of equality prevailed with the election of Obama as the U.S president:

MM 18: Adam Bradley “understands that many of an older generation see Obama’s victory as a culmination of Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream” (Merida, 2008).

MM 15: Wesley Carter states, “I’m the oldest thing around here, and I never believed I’d see a Black man as president in my lifetime. It’s Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream coming true” (Fields, 2008).
MM 11: Sheryl Dewalt states, “To me, this is prophetic. It’s connecting the dots from Martin Luther King and his dream to see the promised land…This is the fulfillment. Obama was born to be president” (Turner, 2008).

**Specific historical events indicating a trajectory of progress toward racial equality**

MM 19: “Before it was changed by the 14th Amendment, the Constitution defined someone like Obama as three-fifths of a person” (USA Today, 2008).

MM 18: Lorraine Bell states, “We felt that not only were we voting for ourselves, but we were voting for my grandparents and for all the African Americans who were ever denied the vote” (Merida, 2008).

MM 11: “Only 43 years have elapsed since the passage of President Johnson’s Voting Rights Act—a measure designed to buttress the 15th Amendment enfranchising Blacks—and even fewer have passed since President Reagan signed a measure definitively granting Blacks the right to hold office” (Turner, 2008).

MM 10: “In January, he will become the 44th president of a nation that has struggled to come to grips with its history of slavery and its bloody battles for civil rights that raged just a few decades ago” (New York Post, 2008).

MM 9: The New York Post (2008) lists a brief history of the African American struggle to vote. This article includes the Dred Scott Case of 1847, The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, the 15th Amendment of 1870, the Civil Rights Act of 1875, the first and second Mississippi Plan, Jim Crow policies, the Plessy vs. Ferguson case, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
And now, 145 years after the Emancipation Proclamation formally abolished slavery and 43 years after the Voting Rights Act, a Black man will hold the highest office of the United States of America—a nation where Blacks were legally considered second-class citizens” (New York Post, 2008).

The election of Barack Obama symbolizes the resurrection of hope and the restoration of belief in a country that has often failed to treat its Black citizens as kin” (Dyson, 2008).

Obama’s historic win is the triumphant closing of a circle of possibility begun when former slaves boldly imagined that one of their offspring would one day lead the nation that enslaved their ancestors” (Dyson, 2008).

Research Sub-Question 1c

RQ1c: How do Black media racially portray President Obama?

Black media coverage of Obama’s election is very different from coverage in mainstream media. While mainstream media emphasized narrative with accompanying photographs, Black media emphasized photographs with accompanying narrative. First each article was individually analyzed for portrayal of Obama’s race. This strategy is different from the way that the 20 mainstream media articles were analyzed due to the limited number of Black magazines. This strategy also allowed for a more contextually based examination of each article for racial portrayals. Table 2, located in the appendix, shows sub-themes that surfaced from Black magazine portrayals of Obama’s race, along with whether or not each story contains elements relating to that theme. One theme emerged from Black media articles.

Jet was the only magazine that thoroughly covered the election. In other magazines, the historical event was covered in a single narrative paragraph or multiple photographs. There are
four sub-themes that emerged from the photographs, including Obama waving his hand, the occurrence of flags, raised hands from the crowd, and pictures of the first family. The articles are replete with photographs that visually represent the story of Obama’s victory.

In December 2008, *Essence* magazine covered the 25 most influential African Americans in 2008. Obama was named *Essence*’s 2009 Reader’s Choice African American of the Year. The magazine dedicated a paragraph to the election with no photograph.

“Folks were skeptical that this first-term Illinois senator, a Black man, could lead a successful campaign for the country’s highest office” (Gordy, 2008, p. 149).

“By the time he clinched the Democratic nomination in August, African Americans, whether or not they had even supported his campaign in the beginning, were inspired by the genuine possibility of seeing the first Black president” (Gordy, 2008, p. 149).

*Ebony magazine* did a cover story on Obama, which included a full-page photograph of his acceptance speech, along with four other photos. The story included five total comments about his victory, with only one remark mentioning his race.

BM 2: “The convention was attended by a huge number of African Americans, many of whom shed tears when Obama accepted the nomination for president, making him the first Black person to accept a major party’s nomination” (Ebony, 2008, p. 29).

**Photos**

The cover shows Obama waving his left hand behind the podium with multiple flags and a window behind him.

The second page includes four pictures: 1) Michelle Obama clapping with a flag underneath her, 2) The first family smiling and waving while Obama smiles and touches Sen. Joe
Biden hugging his wife Jill Biden, 3) Sen. Ted Kennedy looking up smiling, 4) and a lady from the crowd holding a flag.

*Black Enterprise* magazine covered Obama’s election in January, 2009, two months after the inauguration. The two-page story included a half-page photograph, along with the president’s agenda once sworn in.


BM 1: “Tears were shed by members of the civil rights generation who vividly remember a country that denied legions of Black Americans the right to vote less than 50 years ago, while cheers came from the multi-hued masses of young people who seized the significance of the moment” (Dingle, 2009, p. 72).

BM: 1 “The nation’s 44th president is the type of leader our editors have championed in the pages of this magazine for almost four decades—an African American with a razor-sharp intellect, top-notch skills, and exceptional credentials who can perform at the highest level” (Dingle, 2009, p. 72-73).

**Photos**

The story includes a half-page photograph of the mass crowd that gathered for the inauguration. USA is displayed in big letters on one of the Chicago buildings in the background. The stage is set to the right with the first family facing the crowd. The second page includes a photograph of flags lined up in a row, and the first family waving to the crowd in front of more flags.
Jet magazine is the only publication that extensively covered the inauguration with text. Though the majority of the story was eight photographs, many comments subscribe to two prior themes that emerged from mainstream media coverage. The majority of these comments were quotations by individuals.

Specific historical events indicating a trajectory of progress toward racial equality

BM 4: “Nearly 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation gave Blacks freedom, and 43 years after the Voting Rights Act gave Blacks a voice, America has elected Barack Obama as the first African American president of the United States” (Chappell, 2008, p. 27).

BM 4: Rep. Carolyn C. Kilpatrick, chair of the Congressional Black Caucuses, asserts, “His victory represents a significant shift in our nation’s politics and priorities. It signals that we have made great strides in breaking down racial and cultural barriers that have historically paralyzed the full participation of all Americans” (Chappell, 2008, p. 32).

BM 4: Rev. Al Sharpton states, “Obama becoming president doesn’t close the race gap in America, but it puts us in the position to close it” (Chappell, 2008, p. 33).

BM 4: Eliphalet Williams states, “We were treated so unfairly back then. I never thought that we would have the opportunity to vote for a Black president” (Chappell, 2008, p. 34).

Identifying Obama as Black

BM 4: Mary Alice Gandy states, “I’ve never seen a Black man like him before in my life” (Chappell, 2008, p. 34).

BM 4: “Obama defeated Republican John McCain to make history as the first African American to be elected president of the United States” (Chappell, 2008, p. 29).
Photos

From top to bottom, the front page includes Obama waving his left hand to the crowd standing in front of a flag. The second photo includes Obama standing behind the podium with a row of flags to his left addressing the crowd. The third photo shows the crowd gazing up at the screen, some waving flags, while Obama speaks with two flags off to the left. The fourth photo includes Barack and Michelle Obama and Joe and Jill Biden holding hands with Obama waving to the crowd with flags behind them. The fifth and seventh photos show a tight shot of raised hands from the crowd. The sixth photo includes faces from the crowd filled with excitement while waving, taking photos and clapping. The eighth photo shows Rev. Jesse Jackson with his finger on his mouth with it wide open.

The following theme emerged from Black media:

Theme 1: Obama is Black

Nowhere in the Black media portrayals was it mentioned that Obama was anything but Black. The issue of his Biraciality is a nonissue in Black media. The clear implication is that Black media follow the one-drop rule in portraying Obama’s race.

Three comments in two magazine stories referenced historical events, including the Civil Rights generation, Emancipation Proclamation and Voting Rights Act, but were not sufficient enough to cluster into a theme. Acknowledgment of his Biracial lineage was not as prevalent in Black media articles, however, all four articles portray Obama as the “first Black or African American president”.

45
The prior themes and excerpts add insight into the overarching research question: RQ1: What unique and shared understandings of racial identity emerge from thematic analysis of media and self portrayals of President Obama as “the first Black president”?

Analysis of media portrayals indicates that both Black and mainstream media articles acknowledge Obama’s election as a historical moment by classifying him as the “first Black president”. In Black media articles the issue of Obama’s race is a given. He is Black, no explanation required. They view Obama’s election as an inspirational, unprecedented event in history. Photos appear to be of more importance in Black magazines. Paradoxically, mainstream media classifies Obama as the “first Black president” and note his Biracial heritage. Mainstream media articles justify this classification by placing his election within a historical context. Both types of media appear to make their portrayals based on the one-drop rule.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

Because a Biracial man has been classified as the “first Black president”, this study was concerned with the role that Obama’s self portrayal as well as his portrayals in mainstream and Black media play in identifying him as the “first Black president.” Biracial people, historically labeled “mulattos” (Winters & DeBose, 2002), have been variously defined by society, and placed into arbitrary categories, at times separated from the White race, at others, assimilated into the White race (Korgen, 1998). This study sought to uncover how Obama, a Biracial man, has been racially identified, while examining the societal norm that a Biracial person can only be a member of one ethnic group (Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008). A thematic analysis, including both deductive and inductive methods was profitably applied to unpack the common and unique themes surrounding Obama’s race. In the following section, a summary of the research findings and implications will be discussed, including Obama’s self portrayal along with mainstream and Black media portrayals of his race. Next, directions for future research and the study’s limitations are discussed, followed lastly by concluding remarks.

Research Sub-Question 1a

RQ1a: How is President Obama’s racial self portrayal reflected in his book Dreams from my Father?

Obama’s racial self-identification has been an internal struggle. His narratives to some degree reflect all four of Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2008) identity types as well as the emergent Ambivalent Identity. It seems clear that the emergent Ambivalent Identity reflected in Obama’s writing led him to ultimately embrace a Singular Identity as a Black man. Obama’s narrative reflects many instances in which he felt uneasy about his race. Excerpts reviewed in the
prior chapter summarize Obama’s struggles with race growing up. For instance, in high school his Black friends would talk about their struggles around him and he would feel isolated from the group and did not want to risk exposure of his Ambivalent Identity. Therefore, he would hardly speak up and express his opinions because he failed to know his place between the two groups. Obama asserts, “I was different, after all, potentially suspect; I had no idea who my own self was. Unwilling to risk exposure, I would quickly retreat to safer ground” (2004, p. 76).

Although Obama shows patterns that subscribe to an Ambivalent Identity type, he ultimately self-identifies as Black. This is a result of his cultural background and life experiences, as well as his negotiation of the ambivalence. As per Orbe and Strother (1996), legal definitions notwithstanding, history demonstrates that children of Black-White heritage identified with and became part of larger African American communities much more readily than they did European-American ones.

This choice to identify more with his Black heritage can be traced to three factors: 1) his appearance, 2) his White family’s role in raising him to appreciate people of color and the struggle for equality, and 3) society’s role in restructuring the rights of Black people.

**Appearance**

Peery and Bodenhausen (2008) conclude that biological cues exert more consistent influence on racial categorizations than do cultural cues. Biological cues include the appearance of the individual. Cultural cues include the background and cultural upbringing of the individual, including reference groups or family involvement and attachment. Thus, Obama’s dark-skin tone increases the chances of him being viewed as Black, regardless of his demographics or cultural background. The impact of his appearance along with the one-drop rule heavily influenced Obama’s preference to identify more with his Black side.
It appears that Obama’s self identity has been strongly impacted by the historical one-drop rule, which is associated with the Singular Identity option. Obama’s appearance led people to view him as Black, or at least partly Black, thus leading to application of the one-drop rule. As prior findings indicate (Winters & DeBose, 2002), the one-drop rule posits that any trace of African heritage in an individual makes them Black. One reason that parents of Biracial children raise their children to embrace their Black heritage, rather than their White heritage, is to prepare them for interactions in a society that will define them as Black regardless of their cultural upbringing or appearance. Although many interracial couples would prefer otherwise, the larger society still sees their children as Black, thus, in order to assist in their survival/success, having a Black identity is seen as the only option (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995).

**Obama’s White family’s role in raising him to appreciate people of color and the struggle for equality**

In addition, research (Socha & Diggs, 1999) concludes that many parents of Biracial children raise their children as Black with little or no attention to their White ancestry due to the social upheavals that have taken place in history. Obama’s parents were married before the 1967 Loving vs. the Commonwealth of Virginia ruling the banned miscegenation as unconstitutional. Before this case, miscegenation was a felony in over half of the states in the union (Obama, 2004, p. 11). Obama’s mother chose to prepare him for the society in which he would be raised. Though Obama was raised by his White family, the societal and educational climate in which he was raised categorized him as Black.

Considering Obama’s narratives, it appears that his White family instilled in him the importance of the values of the Civil Rights Movement. Obama states, “My mother was inspired by the Civil Rights movement and she would drill into me the values that she saw there:
tolerance, equality, and standing up for the disadvantaged” (2004, p. 29). Obama came to appreciate these values. These same values would lead him to identity with the Black community and lead him to accept several “first Black” titles, including the “first Black president” of the Harvard Law Review in law school. In reference to the Civil Rights Movement, Obama states, “As the child of a mixed marriage, my life would have been impossible, my opportunities entirely foreclosed, without the social upheavals that were then taking place” (2004, p. 29).

**Society’s role in categorizing Obama as Black**

In his narrative, Obama discusses his life experiences, in which society decided for him that he was Black and how he learned to view the world through the lens of a Black man. As history shows during the Civil War era, “Biracial people came to understand that, no matter how brown instead of Black they appeared, they would always be seen as Black by the White population” (Korgen, 1998, p.17). Obama has come to understand the same reality and has endured many trials because of the way he is seen by society: “security guards tailing me as I shop in dept stores, White couples who toss me their car keys as I stand outside a restaurant waiting for the valet, police cars pulling me over for no apparent reason” (Obama, 2004, p. 233). For these reasons, Obama has been pigeonholed into adopting a singular Black identity. He has been arbitrarily categorized by society, the community, friends and family as a Black man as a result of the one-drop rule. However, Obama has chosen to accept this label, although he believes that in America, no one really knows exactly what being Black means (Obama, 2004, p. 70).
Research Sub-Question 1b

RQ1b: How do mainstream media racially portray President Obama?

The three themes that emerged from mainstream media news articles provide insight into the portrayal of Obama as the “first Black president.” All three themes are related to one another. The first theme states: identifying Obama as Black while acknowledging his Biracial lineage. Interestingly enough, half of the articles acknowledged his Biracial heritage, but named him the “first Black president.” Therefore, it appears that the only logical explanation for this portrayal is that the one-drop rule is still followed by the media. The excerpts that label him as Black thematically note that he is the first, an inspiration, and talented. Therefore, articles viewed Obama’s presidential success as a positive moment in history. A Biracial man was credited as the “first Black president” because his Black heritage did not ultimately prevent him from being elected president.

Obama’s inauguration signaled a widespread discussion of whether or not America has entered into a post-racial future considering the historical fight for equality. The second theme was Obama’s election as indication of a post-racial future. Theme 3 is an extension of theme 2, which was Obama as beneficiary of the efforts of Black forefathers. Since Obama is solely portrayed as an African American, his title as president marks an unprecedented event in history. Regardless of his Biracial heritage, at one time, a person who looked like Obama would not have had the right to vote (Korgen, 1998). He very likely would have been portrayed as a Black man centuries ago, which could have resulted in him being enslaved and only decades ago, could have found him abandoned and segregated from his White family (Korgen, 1998) and facing discrimination because of the Jim Crow laws (Moore, 2008).
A society that once banned African Americans from voting and which still largely ascribes to the one-drop rule has elected a Biracial man to the highest office in the land. Many historical events and people are viewed as facilitators who laid the groundwork for this historic event as they dedicated their lives to the fight for equal rights and fair treatment. Some of the articles identify men and women who faced brutal prejudices fighting for their rights and who dreamed of equal treatment for all. Obama’s election into office symbolized a dream becoming a reality. Martin Luther King Jr, who battled for civil rights only decades ago, had a dream that one day America would be racially united and a man would not be characterized by the color of his skin (King & Washington, 1991). In summary, mainstream media articles focus on how far America has come on its racial journey to justice and equality for Black society by characterizing Obama’s election in a historical context. It appears that Obama was labeled as a Black man (Theme 1) by society due to the demand for a post-racial future (Theme 2), in which Obama has benefited from Black forefathers’ who paved the way for justice and equality (Theme 3). The articles view Obama as living Martin Luther King’s dream.

Research Sub-Question 1c

RQ1c: How do Black media racially portray President Obama?

Black media covered the inauguration through photos including narratives and themes in photos that relate to American ideals, flag, family, the multiracial audience at his inauguration, as examples. This preference to cover the election with photography was an unexpected finding and deserves more research. Black Enterprise did not cover the election until January of 2009, in an article entitled, A New Day, which shows that covering the election was not rushed. Essence failed to do a cover story over the inauguration but listed Obama as Reader’s Choice African American of the Year in a small paragraph. Considering these factors, it appears that the
inauguration was not a hot topic to these two magazine sources. However, the other two sources extensively covered the inauguration with photography.

The predominant theme was assessed more by the omission of the commission. There was no reason to discuss whether or not Obama was Black. It was simply a given. The emergent Black media theme was: Obama as Black regardless of his Biracial lineage. Traditionally, it has been Black communities that have embraced Biracial children as their own rather than White (Socha & Diggs, 1999). Therefore, Obama could have been received by the Black community as one of their own because of the norm that Black communities commonly embrace Biracial children. However, the only logical conclusion is that Black media still rely on the one-drop rule to socially categorize Black people.

Furthermore, in regard to both mainstream and Black media, research concludes that it is not unusual for Biracial individuals to be viewed as natural leaders. During the fight for racial equality during the time of the Jim Crow laws and the Harlem Renaissance, “both Blacks and Whites viewed Biracial people as the natural leaders of the Black community” (Korgen, 1998, p. 18). This can be applied to the election of Obama and the mainstream media portrayal of him as a Black leader in the country. During the Civil Rights era, “Blacks made Biracial people their leaders and Whites accepted them as Black leaders” (Zack, 1993, p. 114). Therefore, history shows that during times of social upheavals there was a common understanding that Biracial people could be received and respected by both groups as leaders of Black people. In some way, Biracial leaders have been the means to bridging the gap between Blacks and Whites.
**Future Research**

New questions and directions emerged from the findings of this study, and should be considered for future research. More specifically, I recommend the following questions to be researched: 1) Future research could focus on the impact of Obama’s selection of a Singular Identity on the identity negotiation of other Biracial individuals. 2) Do successful Black people feel more compelled to embrace their Black heritage because of the accomplished Black ancestors who paved the way for them, and/or because they are paving the way for Black women and men of the future? 3) Black media preference and implications of covering major events predominantly with photography rather than narrative could be researched as thorough analysis from this perspective was beyond the scope of this thesis. 4) A comparative analysis could be conducted over the societal portrayal of the 42nd president, Bill Clinton, as the “first Black president” to evaluate the rhetoric of Black when it involves holding prestigious titles, such as the presidency. 5) Furthermore, a more in depth analysis of the media coverage prior to the election and now almost 2 years late should be conducted. 6) Lastly, an analysis of coverage on TV, social media, internet, etc. of Obama’s election should be made, as this is a multi-media based society.

**Limitations**

This research study has two limitations. Anecdotally it appears that limiting the articles covered to immediately after the election missed some of the prior rich discussion of Obama’s race that appeared in the media, so a fuller understanding would be gained with a broader analysis of the issue. Also, Obama’s autobiography, *Dreams from my Father*, was the only source utilized for analysis of his self-identity, a more extensive review of his narratives might provide more insight into the intricacies of his identity choice.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Racial identity is not fixed or mutually exclusive, but rests on individualistic choices within structurally and culturally defined parameters (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). The common theme in research studies is that the one-drop rule is a significant factor in socially classifying race (Korgen, 1998; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2008). Obama has primarily adopted a Black identity due to his life experiences, cultural upbringing and the effects of the one-drop rule. Consistent with prior findings, the one-drop rule still proves to be a potent, active agency in determining race. The larger society still sees Biracial individuals as Black, thus, in order to assist in their survival/success, having a Black identity is seen as the only option (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). It is clear that racial classification has been a complex, multi-layered process in U.S. history.

As prior research notes, the addition of the “check all that apply” option in 2000 for reporting race on the U.S. Census suggests that the notion of assigning Biracial children to the Black race, is considered outmoded (Brunsma, 2006). This is not the case when it comes to Barack Obama’s self-portrayal. Anecdotal evidence indicates that multiracial people still encounter mono-racial categorizations (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). As a result of his Ambivalent Identity, Obama’s lifelong struggle with his race has led him to choose a Singular Identity. He has chosen to claim his Black ancestry. Although it took centuries for multiracial people to finally have the opportunity to “check all that apply” on the U.S. Census, Obama chose to disregard the option.
On April 2, 2010 it was reported by Washington Post that Obama had officially announced that he is Black on the U.S. Census. “The White House confirmed on Friday that Obama did not check multiple boxes on his U.S. Census form, or choose the option that allows him to elaborate on his racial heritage. He ticked the box that says Black, African American, or Negro” (Smith, 2010). Thus, Obama has proudly marked history as the “first Black president.” This characterization disregards his White ancestry and could possibly counteract the mixed-race movement if his example encourages Biracial people to identify with their Black heritage. Ironically, his acceptance of the title as the “first Black president” could indicate that America will never enter a post-racial future if Biracial individuals continue to allow themselves to be placed in arbitrary categories. Unfortunately, Biracial individuals may never break away from being caught between the two ends of the dominant race continuum.


**Narratives used in study:**


Table 1 (Mainstream Newspapers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Biracial</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chicago Tribune</strong></td>
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<td>MM 1</td>
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<td>A Black President? Many Marvel</td>
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<td>Has America Crossed Bridge?</td>
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<td><strong>Los Angeles Times</strong></td>
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<td>MM 3</td>
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<td>Post Race</td>
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<td>MM 4</td>
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<td>Obama’s Post-Racial Promise</td>
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<td><strong>Newsday</strong></td>
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<td>MM 5</td>
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<td>Obama Sweeps the Victory</td>
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<td>MM 6</td>
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<td>Historic Election 'A Long Time Coming'</td>
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<td>MM 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Man Changes Entire Nation</td>
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<td>A President for History</td>
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<td>Barack’s Win Makes History</td>
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<td>Election 2008; Historic First</td>
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<td>Election ’08: Racial Significance of Vote</td>
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<td>Obama Sweeps to Historic Victory</td>
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<td>MM 17</td>
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<td>Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois</td>
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<td>America’s History Gives Way to its Future</td>
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<td>Obama’s Historic Journey Shows How Far U.S Has Come</td>
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