Composite of complexity: Manifestations of whiteness and class among Las Vegas Italian Americans

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COMPOSITE OF COMPLEXITY: MANIFESTATIONS OF WHITENESS AND CLASS AMONG LAS VEGAS ITALIAN AMERICANS

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ABSTRACT

Composite of Complexity: Manifestations of Whiteness and Class among Las Vegas Italian Americans

by

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Conventional terminology and conventional boundaries, in regard to ethnicity, are no longer applicable to the ever shifting population of the United States. In specific, the various degrees of White ethnic identity does not easily transition into convenient all encompassing categories such as Caucasian or more simply, White. Whiteness studies have been at the forefront of this critique, most recently asserting that White ethnic identity is heavily influenced by context. However, although many studies are now recognizing the impact of multiple layers of White ethnic identity (along the lines of gender, locale, socioeconomic level etc.) many still neglect to identify a divide amongst White ethnic groups in terms of skin color and other physical attributes. Michel Foucault’s biopower construct establishes an intricate means for which to discern differences not only amongst, but within White ethnic groups, such as Italian Americans. I examine White ethnicity among Las Vegas Italian Americans to demonstrate that there are ways in which White ethnic groups differentiate themselves by physical attributes in relation to ethnicity (anatomo-politics) as well as how class differences are also marked within the physical realm. Data collection consists of interviews, cultural domain
analysis, participant observation and surveys in order to address the element of self-definition or agency within the research population. In order to situate the structural elements (bio-politics) my study requires an in depth examination and critique of the United States Census categories, a structural element that imposes the racial categories of White and Caucasian onto the population. I also explore, through interviews and cultural domain analysis, the disparity between Northern/Southern Italian and Italian American culture, and how this divide is manifest within the physical realm. The contribution to anthropological inquiry this study provides is to devise an alternate means to explore the meaning behind the state constructs evident in such simplistically derived categories of Caucasian or White.
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INTRODUCTION

INTERTWINING VARIABLES OF CLASS AND CULTURE

Darkness descended swiftly in the surrounding desert. In the background I heard a litany of Italian words uttered in pure exasperation as they spilled over the still night air. The air was so thickly penetrated by heat that it caused discomfort to the enthusiastic bocce players on this particular Wednesday night at the Italian American Club (known to members as the Club) in Las Vegas. As the bocce matches ended, we received a much needed reprieve from the heat and most of the players began the trek back to their cars or to the welcoming coolness of the inside of the social club.

After the matches I walked to the front of the Club and I noticed the parking lot had filled up. There were people milling about outside the front entrance, all wearing formal attire. I recognized no one. I made my way through the crowd surrounding the front door. I reached the familiar bar and proceeded to look for Jimmy. I did not see him anywhere so I asked Jane where he went. She didn’t know. I made my way back outside, past the crowd, past two young men in formal suits and I stood by Jimmy’s truck. After a few minutes, he appeared. Then we both walked back to the front entrance of the Club and stood around and began observing people. There was a proliferation of people we did not recognize: outsiders. This was unusual because on Wednesdays the Club belonged to the bocce players and the members of the Club. Everyone that was lingering outside the Club tonight appeared to be ethnic and at first we thought they were Mexican, then Greek then we found out they were actually Gypsy and that there was a Gypsy wedding reception being hosted in the banquet room of the Club. Sal came outside to smoke and joined Jimmy and I in our speculations. Sal engaged a few of the
young men in conversation. It appeared that a fight might break out as one of the men slapped another on the face. There were a few moments of tension and then it broke up as they joked, “we need bouncers.” Sal then asked the young man he was talking to about his cultural background. The young man replied that they were Gypsy. Sal said, “Yeah no disrespect I was wondering because you all reminded me of back home, with the big parties and big drama, you reminded me of Italians.” The young man then asked Jimmy what he was and he said, “Italian.” I thought it was interesting that Jimmy described himself as fully Italian, as I knew he was only a quarter Italian. The young Gypsy man then said: “We’re a little bit of everything, including Italian, we don’t have a home.” Then he laughed.

How do the interactions described in the above vignette reflect a snapshot of modern ethnicity in the United States? What information regarding “race” can be derived out of this set of interactions? First off, there is an example of the intersection of relations between ethnic boundaries. The Italian American Club, and bocce (a traditional Italian pastime) are representations of Italian American culture and ethnic tradition. However, through both of these other cultural backgrounds are evident. There are also a bevy of social classes that comprise the setting of this social, or cultural club. In addition, the importance of ethnic labels is emphasized. As a cultural space set aside to recognize and reinforce Italian American identity, there are numerous other ethnic identities evident as well. Guessing the young Gypsy man’s ethnicity, drawing associations among and between cultural groups, self-identifying as well as labeling others are all present within this set of interactions. As the young man concludes, “we don’t have a home, we’re a bit of everything,” is this a foreshadowing of the future of ethnicity in America? What is to
become of the omnipresent ethnic groups? Where will the lines between ethnic groups be drawn? What shall encompass the boundaries between ethnic groups? Are we all destined to be without definition, to be a bit of everything?

An intricate interplay of constantly revolving factors promotes the ongoing negotiation of ethnic identity. Deciphering the identity of White ethnic groups such as Italian Americans demonstrates that there are various lines of demarcation drawn within the simplistically derived category of White and there are various shades and graduations of Whiteness. The minimalism presented by the current racial category regime seems almost a given to social scientists, but how does it actually play out in reality? How do people negotiate their identity in everyday situations and interactions? How is Whiteness understood by White ethnics both as a skin color and a concept and how does this contribute to our understanding of state generated ethnic categories? In this study, I hope to bridge the disparity between theory and practice by providing a snapshot of modern White ethnicity amongst Italian Americans in Las Vegas. To my knowledge, there has not been any such study conducted in Las Vegas. This study seeks to link structure and agency by utilizing Michele Foucault’s biopower construct to illustrate that Whiteness is a factor regulated by the state through these state sanctioned racial categories (bio-politics) and is represented and manifest physically in everyday interactions (anatomo-politics).

Italian Americans present a unique vantage point in American society because they were once considered “Dark Others” and now, according to most theorists, have bridged the gap and are representative of mainstream America. However, the ideology regarding the Northern/Southern divide in Italy was imported to the United States with
the immigrants and inevitably intersected with the American racial ideology already in place. The Italian American ideology regarding the Northern/Southern divide is an example of socio-race. Race is represented by both physical factors (lighter skin and other physical attributes associated the wealthy, educated and elite North and darker skin and physical attributes associated with the uneducated, rural South) as well as socio-economic factors. I illustrate how this ideology moves with or against the current racial ideology in America. In doing so, I decipher the varying, fluctuating and ever evident degrees of Whiteness and the diversity that is encompassed within the blanketing category of White, which is often synonymous with a non-ethnic status.

Whiteness is regulated through the structure of state bureaucracy and state generated ethnic categories, both on the practical as well as ideological levels. However Whiteness often plays out in practice quite differently than it does in theory. Las Vegas Italian Americans demonstrate that Whiteness manifests differently within this category and that being labeled as White does not remove all traces of ethnic identity. Whiteness is not synonymous with a loss of culture or a mandated journey into the land of assimilation.

Whiteness is a socially constructed concept, is often politically motivated and determined by the powers that be. It is influenced by time and place and subject to outside scrutiny and demands, in contrast to self-definition and conception. It is my intention to formulate a study which presents a bridge to understand this difficult construct, focusing on a White ethnic group and their conception of Whiteness both as a skin color as well as a concept. The physical aspects of Whiteness facilitate the
understanding of Whiteness as a concept. Throughout this thesis I shall examine the intersecting realities and determining influences of class and culture.

Categorization: A National Obsession

Early in 2010 the census forms were distributed by mail and citizens were once again required to define themselves in accordance to state sanctioned racial categories. The 2010 census offered several different options but still adhered to the basic five categories: Hispanic, White, Black, American Indian or Asian. This census differed from those in the past, in that it broke down the Hispanic category into multiple ethnic groups providing separate boxes to check for Mexican, Puerto Rican etc. as well as a self-identifying box for those ethnic groups not given their own box. The Asian category was broken down similarly, identifying major Asian ethnic groups and providing their separate boxes, along with an option to self-identify for any ethnic category not listed. The American Indian or Alaskan Native option also provided a separate box to write in a tribal affiliation. And then, there was also the “Some other race” category. The option to check more than one box was introduced in the 2000 Census. Perhaps most interesting to note, regarding the 2010 Census racial options, is that there are two categories without any additional options: Black and White. These two categories are not provided any additional boxes to check for specific racial or ethnic identification, and there was no option to self-identify and write in one’s own answer either. Perhaps, one could select the “Some other race” category, but what does that imply? The focus is still on what’s not White and the diversity accorded to those of a minority status in the United States, with the exception of African Americans. These categories allow for a break down and further labeling and segregating not only amongst but within their state sanctioned categories.
What does this say about Whiteness? That it is inclusive and engulfing and there is a disallowance of diversity within this category.

Benedict Anderson (1991) declares that nations are in and of themselves, imagined constructs. Nations are invented and promote a falsely constructed sense of togetherness, or of oneness (6). He considers the census an institution of power whose purpose was to promote this sense of nationalism (163). During the colonial period the various censuses utilized by the power structures underwent considerable shifting, considerable changes to the categories themselves, however those in positions of power were always placed on the top of the heap of identities (164). In addition, these categories began to transition from considering religion as a basis for differentiation to being almost exclusively racial categories (164). This furthers the argument that race is a socially constructed and invented concept. And it stands to reason that because it is invented, the reality of racial awareness, of racial identity would stand in stark contrast to the identity neatly constructed and pre-packaged on the state provided forms. “The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it and that everyone has one and only one, extremely clear place. No fractions” (Anderson 1991:166).

Ethnic categories and their associated ideology are so pervasive in this country that they may be deemed a structural regulatory force (bio-politics). Indeed, these categories are utilized by various governing agencies, businesses, law, higher education, etc. Thus ethnic categories are both a regulating force through ideology, and also literally. One is continually confronted with these categories and forced into definition, and regardless through which societal agent at some point they all intersect and present the same demand for definition.
Hybrid Theory

There are five racial categories outlined by Office of Management and Budget and the census has utilized these five racial categories in addition to the “Some other race” category. These six categories are as follows: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander and Some Other Race. The “Other” option was again presented in the 2010 census document. These racial categories are also present in institutions of higher learning (UNLV’s Ethnicity/Racial Information Update: Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander or White), as well as in business sweepstakes surveys (Walmart’s $1000 monthly survey prize: Caucasian/White, Black/African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Eskimo and Other, specify). The two examples of racial categories are demonstrative of the prevalence of racial categorization. It is not just with government documents, such as the census, that one is confronted with these categories. They are well represented in all realms of society, including higher education and in day to day business interactions.

These five primary racial categories represent a firmly held ideology regarding race that is divisive and rudimentary. I have found such forms to be extremely frustrating given my own mixed ethnic background as they forced me into definitions I was always unsure of and there was always the feeling present that I was marked by a definition I did not devise of my own accord. If I were to go by physical appearance then would I check the White box or the Hispanic box? These are the two ethnic groupings I would fit based
on physical attributes, the ethnic groupings into which I am most often categorized by
others. Yet I am three quarters White and not Hispanic at all.

All my life there has been a curiosity regarding my ethnic background, and it is
usually a topic of conversation within the first few minutes I make the acquaintance of
someone new. Sometimes, I would engage the unsuspecting person in a game I enjoyed,
where I would require them to guess my “race” or ethnic background. They asked; so I
would often answer with a question of my own. Their answers illustrated that the way
members of the population engage with race is often based on physical attributes and
dissecting someone using these characteristics often provided a very inaccurate answer.
When I revealed my ethnic background to these eager inquirers I would regularly be met
with shock or surprise. I memorized my answer to this question as a child and have lost
count of the many times I have repeated it, “half German, a quarter Welsh and a quarter
Korean.” Most people assume I am Hispanic or of mixed European decent but never
Asian! I also developed an extreme distaste early on, for categorizing myself as White,
because I considered myself to be ethnically German and Welsh and had carried down
traditions and a sense of identity, especially from my German grandmother. So, as a
hybrid, I have considered the standard ethnic categories to be an ineffective
representation of self identification. Yet for some reason they still remain. They are still
pervasive and influential throughout all realms of our society.

The Census Bureau lists several practical reasons for collecting information on
individuals’ race: data is used in the legislative redistricting process, monitoring
compliance with the Voting Rights Act and promoting equal access to resources,
recognizing discrimination, as well as serving the needs of the community (Grieco
2001:10). However, in serving the needs of the community, they are also reinforcing these reified racial categories and, in essence, promoting the maintenance of a system of classification by physical attributes. The foundation for this system of classification was based on inequality and restriction, creating a superior group and undesirable “Other,” despite the many different transitions, or “options” associated with this term throughout time. It is still representative of a naturalized White advantage as well as the intentional obscuring of the diversity that exists within the ethnic group conveniently labeled as White. Categorization elucidates how we still conceive and perceive race.

Shifting Frames of Reference: Ethnic Categories, Power and the Census

I was sitting with several of my primary research participants, and at this time we were very comfortable and familiar with each other, as I had been associated with them for the most extended period of time of over two years. Thus, during this interview I felt as though I received their most candid responses. As I proceeded through the interview, I came to a standard question intended to gain perspective on how Italian Americans viewed themselves in the American racial structure, and Nico, in his answer to my question, exercised agency. Most participants viewed the American racial categories provided by the census and other such documents as necessary but unbefitting to describe the actual means of identity construction for a majority of the population. Ethnic categories provide the ultimate fusion of bio-politics (as they are sanctioned means of definition by the state) and anatomo-politics (these “ethnic” categories are obscured racial categories that harken back to the times when the population was divided strictly by physical appearance “red skin” “white skin” “yellow skin”). As such, the state provides these guiding devices for definition which are forced onto the population and also forge a sense of ethnic definition
of identity. Yet is there allowable room for agency? Nico explains that, indeed, if it were up to him these categories would be much more specific:

D: So we’ve kind of discussed this one already, what are some physical characteristics of Italian Americans, physical characteristics of Northern and we kind of went over that already and Southern so in your opinion, are Italian Americans White? And using that term in the larger American concept, American racial category or concept?

N: Well some of them can say “yeah we’re White” but they’re not. They’re Mediterranean, that’s what they are.

C: Well they don’t have their own group.

N: Well I just can’t, you know White is a Protestant Anglo-Saxon come on.

C: Oh you’re

N: They came over on the Mayflower and they all came over on the Mayflower, you know.

G: They’re very close to

N: Who?

G: Ethiopia

N: Yeah they’re closer to Africa they’re closer to

G: Africa right they’re like right over.

N: So I mean they were doing some swimming back and forth you know.

G: (laughs)

C: He’s saying you’re half Black.

G: (laughs)
N: You could be I don’t know, how do I know. I mean when it really comes down to it, I mean do you think life started you know, started in London and in Italy, come on people just migrated all over the place so what do you know about it? You don’t know what you are, you haven’t a clue.

G: Would you characterize us as White?

C: Yeah.

N: You would? Alright.

C: Absolutely.

G: Before I would have said yes I would characterize us as White, but I see his argument, not argument but

N: Well we’re from the Mediterranean region that’s all I’m saying.

G: Right.

C: And yeah that people came from all over, so you never know, but it is in the White category.

N: Well, well I guess if you want to say that okay.

G: Out of all the categories they give you

C: They don’t give you Mediterranean category.

N: I know.

C: Don’t give you that.

G: I’d put Mediterranean.

N: I don’t know, you’re right, there is that but I wouldn’t say.

G: I’d say how do you spell Mediterranean (laughs)

N: Well I think the whole thing is silly myself.
C: You’re confusing her.

N: I know.

D: I understand. So you, if you were to create this category you’d say it’s more Mediterranean, and that is that Italians are different than all of the others, like White Anglo Saxons?

N: Yeah, just like Greeks are Mediterranean and they’re different from Italians

D: But for some reason in America they’re all seemed to be categorized together based on the choices they give, into this White category?

N: Right, right.

In this excerpt, Nico declares that Italian Americans are not White, they are not Anglo-Saxon, but rather Mediterranean, which he considers to be completely different. Indeed, Italians were once considered to be Mediterranean by William Z. Ripley, who divided Europeans into three categories at the turn of the last century: Mediterranean, Nordic and Alpine (Vecoli 2006:94). This divide positioned the Northern and Southern Italians into separate categories, the Southern included into the Mediterranean category. This example of shifting racial categories provides evidence that these categories do not remain crystallized and that as the needs of the state change, as do the provided identities of the populace. And yet again, these Italian Americans I interviewed express that the broad racial categories provided by the state are grossly ineffective in representing the actual identity needs of the population. The categories may play out well in theory but not practice. The particular theory they fit well with, in regard to White ethnics, is assimilation theory. In removing traces of ethnicity, in combining the White populace into a giant uniform mass it furthers the needs of the state: to create a sense of national
identity, rather than separateness, yet still maintain noticeable boundaries between the majority and the minority groups in the country.

The AAA statement on “race” promotes three ideals regarding race: Race is a recent human invention, race is about culture, not biology and race and racism are embedded in institutions and everyday life (AAA website). Similarly, Micaela di Leonardo (1984) indicates ethnicity is a concept resulting from the labeling of specific populations by the state (22-23). It does not matter how or why the segments of the population may be related or unrelated, rather it is the process of labeling them itself that denotes specific ethnic groups, that creates difference and facilitates the construction of ethnicity or ethnic identity (23). Clearly this process of labeling, of defining and then becoming is intricately tied to the power dynamics presented by structural influence (biopolitics).

The category of White/Caucasian does not fit the needs of the population. Las Vegas Italian Americans make sense of or utilize this ethnic category in a variety of ways, continuously engaging and disengaging with this identity. These ethnic categories provided by the state are convenient enumeration devices, yet are still overly simplistic. Although they have been rendered ineffective, they are somehow not yet obsolete. How does one describe or explain without these categories? The issue of the Northern/Southern Italian difference in regard to physical attributes and how Italian Americans view U.S. racial categories refute the logic of existing racial categories.

Transitioning and Retransitioning “Race”

Ian Haney Lopez (2006) provides a searing, critical examination of Whiteness, invisible White privilege and how Whiteness and racial categories were developed and
maintained through the legal system in America. He utilizes immigration cases dating back over a hundred years, in order to detail the development of Whiteness and how this category was both inclusive and exclusive but provided a direct influence on who was allowed to immigrate under the strict naturalization laws, where race was a determining factor of citizenship. However, it is through these cases and applications for citizenship that this becomes apparent: determining who was White, and providing justification for these decisions was no simple matter. The courts needed to develop the boundaries of Whiteness and determine who was White, as well as why they were deemed White (2).

He also emphasizes that those who determined race, the decision makers disregarded the transparency of their own White identity and as a consequence, Whiteness became naturalized (18).

As racial boundaries are forged by the state, they become naturalized and are a direct manifestation of the current power structure. Sylvia Yanagisako’s (1995) framework regarding naturalization facilitates the understanding of this process. Yanagisako examines the naturalization of power, how the natural cultural system is intertwined with power. Her focal point in her article on naturalizing power is intersection, looking across boundaries and across domains. “…Rather people think and act at the intersections of discourse” (18). She states that cultural domains, like social institutions, only appear to be natural (9). She stresses focusing on how culturally specific domains have been formed and transformed in relation to other cultural domains, how meanings are carried across boundaries, and how specific actions are multiply constituted (11).
Yanagisako’s contention that cultural domains only appear to be natural is directly applicable to the examination of ethnic categories, such as Caucasian or White, which are determined by the state. These state sanctioned categories are a direct reflection of power, and are so prevalent in everyday reality that they appear to be natural. It is assumed that one must fit easily into these categories and identification as such is often commonplace. However, there is much complexity that exists within categories such as Caucasian and focus must be generated at the intersections in order to understand why these categories are so insufficient. Identity, and White identity, presents a complex process of negotiation. It is reactionary and yet a not all together conscious acknowledgment of status. It is reactionary because this category encourages the continuation of invisible White privilege, a not completely conscious recognition of status or benefits. Often, Italian Americans engage and disengage with their White status in society, and it is this flexibility that garners the most support for the diversity that exists within the category of White or Caucasian. Engaging and disengaging with these labels provides an example of opposition to this assigned definition, a way to move against these structural forces of assigned identity.

The category of White is not the only racial category that has become naturalized, yet it is the one most often equated with invisible privilege. The standard racial system has naturalized not only these racial categories or state sanctioned identities, but also naturalized their representation within the physical realm. Physical attributes are inextricably tied to these categories and remain an enduring presence. Lopez explains that the continental race theory is one of the most pervasive, and it is transpositioned over various physical attributes, categorizing people by skin color (red, yellow, black, etc.)
Lopez asserts that race is a historically contingent social system of meaning that is based on three interrelated levels: the physical, social and material conditions. Each reinforce each other and provide continued reinforcement for the reliance on the separating factors that maintain inequality in terms of their division. In his assessment of possible future outcomes for race in America, Lopez references race in Latin America and its differing composition. Lopez explains that race is on a continuum rather than a polarity and that this continuum is often represented by the various shades of skin color (anatomo-politics) and that race is also influenced by socioeconomic factors, including both economic as well as educational divisions, a socio-racial distinction.

The conception of race in Latin America is similar to how Italians and Italian Americans have construed race. The divide between the North and South, and the manifestations of physical characteristics as markers within this Caucasian population represent a form of socio-racial distinction. My research has demonstrated that there is still evidence of this type of categorization present within the Italian American constituency I interacted with throughout my study in Las Vegas. Ian Haney Lopez concludes that this trend of dividing and conceptualizing race on a continuum may be a future outcome in the United States and may inevitably replace the five primary racial categories. “Some expect this trend to herald the strong emergence of color as a basis for social ordering: the coding of skin tone and physical features as racially light or dark may increasingly replace membership in ordinal races such as African American or Asian as the primary basis for discriminatory treatment” (Lopez 2006:147).
May we ever move past categorization? Will the national obsession with race and racial categories ever recede and be remembered as characteristics of a bygone era? Perhaps not, at least not in the near future. These categories and need for categorization are far too ingrained within our way of life. Racial categories, and thus Whiteness, are regulated through a structure of bureaucracy and state generated ethnic categories both on the practical and ideological levels and are also manifest in everyday interactions of the populace. Although the census cites one of its reasons for utilizing these racial categories as providing community services and combating discrimination, further use of these categories only plays into the ongoing cycle of division and discrimination by physical attributes. “The elaboration of practices and rationales that at once comport with the ideals of non-racialism but preserve and deepen racial inequality, I suggest, form one of the hallmarks of our current racial era” (Lopez 2006:144). Physical features are likely to remain paramount in racializing the populace, into the future and beyond.

Otherness, Continually Revamped

The past few census forms have allowed some semblance of personal choice, in regard to ethnic identification, by offering the enigmatic yet all encompassing “Other” box. However, what is this category and what does it imply? What racial assumptions or associations does it carry with it, this term of “Other?” With the use of the term “Other” there is the implication that there is a comparison being made between one or more selections. If there is an “Other” there must be a “Something Else” that it is an “Other” to or else why would there be a need to differentiate with the term of “Other?” “Other” appears to be racially ambiguous territory; but how ambiguous is it really? With the
binary opposition of “White” and “Non-White” in this country, can a person deemed “White” also be deemed an “Other?”

It is within the boundaries of Whiteness itself where an answer is discovered, in relation to these queries. “Other” carries the direct implication of a “Non-White” status, yet those who were once branded as “Other,” such as Italian Americans, are now included into the category of White, one of the only two categories on the census that does not allow for further diversity, racial breakdown or self-identification. This category is provided as a given, yet it is not always taken as a given by the White population. “Only in the first half of the twentieth century was ‘White’ transformed into a relatively monolithic an undifferentiated group encompassing all persons of European descent in the United States. As with justifications for racial hierarchy, the ideas surrounding racial categories- and the boundaries of Whiteness in particular- have shown a remarkable fluidity that seems likely to continue in the immediate future” (Lopez 2006:150).

Lopez details how the law had a direct impact on the manifestation of various physical features of U.S. citizens. First, he asserts, that the laws which restricted citizenship prevented certain populations with undesirable physical characteristics from not only entering the country but from intermingling with the population or further reproducing amongst themselves and further distributing those features. Also, the laws restricted women from marrying noncitizen men and as a direct consequence influenced the marital choices available for women and controlled their reproductive options (2006:11). This is a direct example of bio-power. The law is a structural form of
regulation (bio-politics) and presented control over the population’s bodies by restricting their reproductive options.

Joseph M. Conforti (1994) details the shifting boundaries of Whiteness and conceptualization of a White identity by dissecting the terms “ethnic” and “non-ethnic” as well as providing a historical perspective on the term “American.” He asserts that the term American is synonymous with non-ethnic. The boundaries of “ethnic” and “non-ethnic” have shifted since the first immigrants arrived in this country. As the English produced the first major influx of Europeans to America, they established the status quo and were instrumental in determining an in group and an out group. However, with each subsequent wave of migration from Europe, the boundaries of American, or White became at first more distinct and then encompassing as the group was eventually situated with the previous group and aligned together against the next wave of the unfamiliar, the foreign, the “Other.” This demonstrates that the flexibility of the concept and identity of American. Similarly, White or Caucasian also followed a similar path of development.

The landmark discrimination/affirmative action case in the early 1990s against the City University of New York (CUNY) was a stark example of White ethnics taking back their “minority” or “Other” status. Dominic R. Massaro claims that “Italian Americans are a cognizable racial group for purposes of the scope and application of civil rights law” (1994:44). He continues to elaborate on the unique positioning of Italian Americans as a minority group by examining the case of Scelsa v. the City University of New York (1992). This was a landmark case because it considered Italian Americans as a minority group that has been discriminated against and linked national origin with the concept of race. Massaro asserts that Italian Americans are an ethnic minority and have not
completely assimilated into Anglo conformity (1994:47). A judge ruled in favor of Scelsa and other Italian American professors at the university and as a result there is a self identification form on employment applications that includes five ethnic groups that are considered for affirmative action, among them Italian Americans (Laurino 2000: 152).

The racial category of “Other” is ambiguous yet at the same time it carries racial implications of a non-White status. Racial categories, and in turn boundaries, in the U.S. are a direct example of bio-politics. This structural form of regulation influences and informs the population where to divide, and this division is focused in the racial realm. Italian Americans were once considered to be foreign, or to possess an “Other” status. The census has now included Italian Americans into the White category and this is demonstrative of power and labeling by a structural entity. They are no longer accorded a minority status by the state, yet as evidenced by the lawsuit against CUNY, some Italian Americans still perceive themselves as being part of a minority group.

Why Italians? White or Not Quite

Italian Americans, since their arrival upon the shores of America, have occupied a distinct niche within the existing racial hierarchy. This hierarchy that is currently established in this country still has yet to plateau, although the boundaries between the groups have become more flexible. “At the beginning of the century, olive-skinned southern Italians brought an ambiguous racial identity to their new land, causing a U.S. Senate committee to label them ‘nonwhite,’” (Laurino 2000:125). Italian Americans are a population that was once deemed, or perhaps branded, as “Other,” foreign and distinct. They have now, according to some theorists and popular consciousness, vanished within the fluctuating amalgamation that composes the category of White. Has “Italianness”
submerged within the complicated mass of interwoven interpretations of White or
Caucasian? If this is the case then have they lost their unique character and claim to
maintain a distinct identity and are they really White? My study demonstrates that there
is still a strong presence of diversity not only within the White ethnic bracket but also
within the ethnic category of Italian. There remains both subtle as well as distinct means
of differentiation, such as physical attributes, within the group of Italian Americans that
further divide the population by social class. The assumptions made based on physical
attributes are, in some form, a representation of the ideology regarding the
Northern/Southern divide which appeared with the first Italian immigrants in America.
Research with Las Vegas Italian Americans demonstrates that there are many divisive
factors, and in turn much diversity, within a White group. This is further evidence that
Whiteness does not imply a loss of color or culture, but rather a transitioning and
retransitioning of identity. There are various shades of Whiteness and White is not a
category representative of a singular skin color or singular physical attributes despite
what the popular vernacular use of the term White encourages.

**Whiteness in the New Millennium**

The new millennium has dawned a decade ago, and as we are now in the midst of
continuous change and continuous restructuring of the identity politics of this country, we
are met with the inevitable need to reformat and restructure the concept of ethnicity.
There is still often a disparity between the understanding of class and race, or ethnicity,
which needs to be bridged. Class was often equated with race, and the *Class Equals
Culture* paradigm began and continued to build in momentum throughout the previous
century. Italian Americans stand as a testament to the bias this paradigm promoted and
the image of the White ethnic prevails even to this day. They are somehow not deemed completely White by Anglo-Saxon standards, yet are still somehow White enough to be given the privileges contained in this category, the often invisible privileges that being considered in this given category provides.

Whiteness in and of itself is a concept that is extremely difficult to pin down as it is transitory, context dependent and continuously evolving throughout time. Whiteness transitions, it fades in and out like the tide. It is sometimes difficult to locate; it is a haunting mist, a vapor that encompasses, that contains, and discourages division and commands subservience to uniformity. It is often difficult to see it when one is immersed within. However, it is also extremely complex, and the diversity contained within this group is unequivocal. Those who were once “ethnic” can transition to Whiteness if provided with the concrete tools mandatory to infiltrate this category, yet only if one possesses the primarily and most basic criteria: the physical manifestations of Whiteness, the physical markers of differentiation that continue to divide the population into the “majority” and the “minority.” Italian Americans occupy a unique niche as they have transitioned from the “exotic Other,” the dark minority they were once considered upon arrival to the United States, into part of the assimilated masses. However, I exercise caution when utilizing the term assimilation, as it is necessary to recognize that no group is ever fully assimilated and often assimilation is a convenient blanketing device to “whiten,” to paint over and encourage a more cohesive national identity. It is also important to recognize that this process of “whitening” does not necessarily attribute its modus operandi to specific physical characteristics, but rather to a continuously fluctuating class system, as well.
What is White? The way this category was generated automatically creates a binary opposition: White and non-White. This categorical organization highlights the power structure of the census and this power structure drives the binary opposition. While the category has become more inclusive throughout intervening years, it still encourages this polarity, this divide. While fair to acknowledge the different graduations of “Other,” the different minority statuses, both in regard to physical appearance and the racial ideology that surrounds Whiteness, remain the ultimate divisors, the ultimate means of demarcation. It is my intention to deconstruct this ubiquitous structure and explore the various makings of identity that ultimately and most certainly exist beyond the boundary. “Racial ideology does not guarantee equality among Whites; it serves rather to mask and distract from gross inequalities that divide that group” (Lopez 2006:148). There are multiple layers of Whiteness that are interposed upon each other.

Daniel J. Monti Jr. (1994) argues against the firmly engrained notion that White ethnics are in the decline of their ethnicity or that they have all but assimilated into a mass White culture. He asserts that ethnicity exists across class lines, and is not restricted to working class urban areas. The image of the White ethnic needs to be restructured and reintegrated into American consciousness. Firmly held beliefs regarding Whiteness are often conjoined with assimilationist mentalities and agendas. Monti (1994) illustrates that there are boundaries within ethnic groups and that Italian Americans demonstrate their ethnic identity and perform and maintain their culture in a variety of ways, according to circumstance or situation. I have found throughout my research that this fact remains: Italian identity has not vanished and is not completely weakening with each succeeding generation, but rather transitioning.
Theoretical Aims

Biopower

A pertinent point regarding Foucault’s theoretical outline of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality I*, is his concept of biopower. There are two distinct components to his theory of biopower: anatomo-politics of the human body and bio-politics of the population, the regulatory controls (1978:139). Anatomo-politics details how the body, or representations and constructions of the human body, are regulated (i.e. how physical attributes are used to classify and thus control a population). Bio-politics provides the basis for structural regulation, how a population is controlled through larger forms of administration or institutions.

I utilize Michel Foucault’s biopower construct in my study to demonstrate that there still is differentiation, both culturally and physically, amongst Italian Americans and other ethnic groups as well as within the encompassing category of Italian American itself. The bio-politics element of this study is centered on the census categories as well as the racial ideology surrounding the Northern/Southern Italian difference. Anatomo-politics demonstrates how these differences, in particular skin color, are manifest within the physical realm of the population. There has long been a recognized division between Italian Americans, as well as Italians, of Northern and Southern heritage. This difference is manifest in physical characteristics (skin color, eye color, hair color etc.) and it is a classed difference as well (the Northern being perceived as educated and elite, the Southern perceived rural and backwards). This bias has existed in Italy since the time of unification and has persisted through the immigration process to transition to Italians in America, as well. Though these differences are recognized primarily among a middle aged constituency of Italian Americans, they still provide evidence that Whiteness is a
concept that is not completely straightforward. Inclusion into this category does not necessarily denote vanishing into the great White yonder. White skin, or skin color in general, and American identity politics are concepts indelibly tied together. However, Whiteness is often a blanketing term and concept. Diversity is rarely recognized within the physical realm (skin color) of this category. My study illustrates that there are recognized differences, that White is a color with many gradations in and of itself and that it is not a concept meaning “without color” or culture for this particular segment of the population.

Class and Distinction

Hal Rothman (2003) observes that the suburbs promote a “White culture” regardless of actual color. Rather suburban culture is more a concept: neatly packaged classed values that are now becoming much more inclusive of minority groups that make the transition to suburban living. “The suburbs draw people of all colors whose values are classed white” (Rothman 2003:294). The neatly manicured lawns of suburbia may obscure some semblance of diversity. However in Las Vegas this is clearly not the case. Las Vegas presents a unique milieu of social classes that operate outside the bounds of any standard classificatory scheme, and thus it is difficult to pin down or neatly describe and categorize specific social or economic classes. Yet there are still class niches evident, and it is this distinction that grants an opportunity. This opportunity is the ability to discover what lies beneath the prevailing glitter of the casinos, how the everyday people in Las Vegas and members of this distinctive populace conceptualize and perform class. The high wage, low skill or low education level economy, “THE Serviced Based Economy,” unrivaled anywhere else, permits a particular quality of life. This way of life
allows one to jump above the class stratum to which one was originally assigned to operate or function within and essentially belong to a higher economic bracket. However, this economy also discourages other markets of capital, such as cultural capital or educational capital. While the economy allows waiters to be on par with lawyers in terms of financial opportunity, there is a significant gulf evident between the classes relative to education and cultural competency. It is essentially a combination of both ascribed as well as achieved statuses that are evident in the distinctive political economy of Las Vegas.

I draw from Pierre Bourdieu’s work in *Distinction* in order to analyze social class and its relation to physical characteristics. He provides a framework for deconstructing social class and examining it as a multifaceted concept that is manifest in many different layers: social, educational, economic etc. My research with Las Vegas Italian Americans demonstrates a fluidity in regard to social class. Italian Americans’ unique position along the American class stratum demonstrates that they are involved in a constant process of reformatting and reconstructing their classed identity. I have focused primarily on a middle class population, and this population is deemed middle class by economic standards, yet as Bourdieu’s work illustrates, there are many other forms of capital other than economic. There is great diversity in terms of educational class or capital and this diversity reflects a portion of the population of Las Vegas in general. My research demonstrates that social class is much more dynamic and there is not adherence to one specific class bracket. There is a fluctuation that occurs, and the boundaries between classes are not as distinct as traditional studies on Italian Americans assume.
Bourdieu’s framework provides support for the notion that social class is often manifest within the physical realm. The subtleties of class are represented through clothing choices, makeup application and various other physical indicators. Social class is also conjoined with physical features: skin color, hair color, eye color among other attributes and is represented through the Northern/Southern ideological divide amongst Italians and Italian Americans. Social class is also tied to other markers of a physical divide such as clothing styles, cosmetic application and hair styles. I have utilized Bourdieu’s framework in order to demonstrate the anatomo-politics of class.

The Class Equals Culture Conundrum

Miceala di Leonardo’s (1984) enlightening portrayal of ethnic identity amongst California Italian Americans demonstrates the interrelated dynamics of gender, ethnicity and class. She also presents an argument against the Class Equals Culture paradigm, which I have designated as the Class Equals Culture Conundrum that is so readily apparent in past, as well as current, portrayals of Italian Americans. She asserts that the Class Equals Culture paradigm has situated Italian Americans and other white ethnics within the constraints of the “warm ethnic family” and that it is in the familial values where maintenance of ethnicity can be observed (25). This misguided diagram also furthers the bias that to be ethnic one must be urban (25). This is particularly evident with Italian Americans, as the majority of studies have been conducted in urban, East Coast and working class settings. Instead of focusing primarily on the family as an institution of ethnic identity formation and maintenance, di Leonardo contends that it is necessary to consider the distinct political economy and work related processes that are guiding structural influences on Italian American ethnic identity.
Although most of the *Class Equals Culture* studies have been conducted over the span of the last fifty years, and there are now other studies that contradict this paradigm, the *Class Equals Culture* bias continues to manifest and contribute to stereotypes of Italian Americans in particular. Recent television shows such as: *Jersey Shore* (2009-10), *Jerseyliscious* (2010), *Jersey Couture* (2010) and *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* (2009-10) emphasize that the popular culture perception of Italian Americans remains: East Coast oriented, flashy but not classy, overtly “gaudy” styled clothing and confined to ethnic associations if not ethnic neighborhoods. It is interesting to note that the *Class Equals Culture Conundrum* is further puzzling as many of the reality show participants on the television shows listed above are affluent and are trying to emulate a working class culture. This imitation is carried outwards through the media, a giant governing and regulating source of bio-politics.

Recent reality television shows are not the only place where these stereotypes are manifest. They have been continuously utilized in film, literature and advertising. “The mass media utilize stereotypes of Italian Americans to entertain, having found that they are quite popular. Needless to say, as entertaining stereotypes, they are usually unassimilated Italian Americans. Whether Rocky, Fonzy, Don Corelone or Mamma, the images are all of uneducated, at least slightly foreign and exotic people who do not fit the image of what we tend to think of as ‘American,’” (Conforti 1994:42). These images are highly recognizable by their physical characteristics and are a direct example of anatomo-politics. Italian Americans often recognize these stereotypes and the fact that they are manufactured by elements outside of their own culture. Fabrizia, one of my research
participants who was born and raised in Italy, explains her disgust with the way
American television portrays an inaccurate representation of Italian dialect:

*F: Very important yes. Now see and this happened especially in the North, as you go
down then, but even in Sicily now they usually have women always wearing like all the
black with the, that’s what they give the image that is related sometime on tv here and I
came here and it was the beginning of television and I remember they would speak in like
dialect and I would say this is tv dialect, invented by Americans, it doesn’t exist. So I
mean I was always really I would say, what are they doing? See I mean newspaper
people should interview people you know like me and then if, they found out all these
things but I noticed though they stopped that now, this false Italian dialect and um well
they use the last one they used was in um The Godfather because see that happen at that
time so they had to use I guess the way the Godfather spoke in the United States, I was
there when that was happening so I remember but um other things, putting cotton in his
mouth was the right thing either. That was stupid.*

Joseph M. Conforti asserts that Italian Americans, in the broader popular
consciousness, are often still associated with the immigrant image. Old immigrant
neighborhoods, such as Little Italy in New York is one of the largest tourist attractions in
the city, yet hardly any Italian Americans reside there anymore (1994:41). He claims that
it is largely the media that maintains this image of the working class ethnic, contained in
these such neighborhoods and that it keeps alive a stereotypical image (1994:42).

The *Class Equals Culture Conundrum* is not only a direct representation of bio-
politics but of anatomo-politics as well. The *Class Equals Culture Conundrum* is an
example of bio-politics because it regulates the population by furthering racial
stereotypes through the media. Class, working class or “gaudy” style is manifest physically. This type of look or style reveals a physical indication of class and, in many cases, culture to certain segments of the population. This particular style or look is representative of regulation by anatomo-politics. The *guido or guidette* style that originated on the East Coast and migrated elsewhere is recognized by Las Vegas Italian Americans as those of a particular class bracket. This stereotype is also evidenced in the media, and as the media is a form of bio-politics, Italian Americans are constrained by the constant association of their culture, their identity as working class, ethnic and constrained to urban ghettos.

The evidenced categories of *guido* and *guidette* as well as the popularity of television shows portraying East Coast Italian American culture would suggest that the avenues of assimilation are not closed off, that assimilation is a process that is not complete in regard to White ethnics. Although Richard Alba (1985) predicted that we are in the twilight of ethnicity, I have found that there is a broad spectrum of assimilation. Las Vegas Italian Americans do not adhere to a cultureless, classless unity a conjoined mass or “melting pot” with all traces of culture faded into a fine mist and barely recognizable. Indeed, culture is still evident.

The *Class Equals Culture Conundrum* demonstrates that Italian Americans are often still perceived and presented as “Other.” This conception of Italian Americans is detrimental because it diminishes the diversity that is encompassed within the category of Italian Americans. “This presumption that ‘class equals culture’ has meant that those Blacks, Latinos and Asians who were not impoverished and those whose ethnics who were not working class, have been ignored as atypical, or else defined as assimilated and
therefore no longer are ethnic, which denies authenticity to rural, suburban and small town dwellers” (di Leonardo 1984:25). This brings into question the issue of authenticity: what is authentic ethnicity? Are White ethnics still ethnic? How does one gauge the parameters of the label “ethnic?” The bias is still evident that to be “ethnic” or to maintain aspects of one’s cultural identity within the White category one must promote a working class, restrictive form of ethnicity. “We in the United States have a limited and ideologically tainted view of ethnicity. We imagine ethnic people to be quaint folk who practice arcane customs and wear brightly colored peasant clothing. It is hard to think of people who are professionals dressed in expensive suits as ‘ethnics.’” (Monti 1994:31).

In many respects the Class Equals Culture Conundrum stands in stark contrast, as a regulating body of bio-politics, with the census categories. The Class Equals Culture Conundrum situates Italian Americans with remnants of their status as “Other.” There is a polarity between these two frames of reference. The census encourages a unified White identity both through ideology as well as physical characteristics and the Class Equals Culture Conundrum continuously reinvents Italian Americans as the differentiated “Other” in contrast to the “ideal White.” How Las Vegas Italian Americans negotiate Whiteness both as a concept as well as a skin color garners evidence that there may be some leeway between these two opposing ideologies.

Setting of the Study: The Vegas Valley and Whiteness in the West

Las Vegas was chosen as the setting for the study as it is a fairly newly formed city whose primary phase of development occurred during the mid twentieth century, at a time when most White ethnics were transitioning into the role of the un-hyphenated
White masses. Some theorists suggest that it was easier for Italian Americans and other White ethnics to “become White” out West. Las Vegas presented many unique opportunities that were not available to Italian Americans in the East and Midwest where the majority of the population still resides. Italian Americans are an under-researched population in Las Vegas. To date, there has not been any significant studies conducted with Las Vegas Italian Americans, with the exception of Alan Balboni’s *Beyond the Mafia* (1996). The majority of studies regarding Italian Americans have been restricted to the East Coast and Midwest areas. Thus, my study will provide a contribution to this neglected area and ethnic population.

**Methodology: Gauging Degrees of Whiteness**

I have utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches in my study of Las Vegas Italian Americans. I relied primarily upon long term, in depth participant observation and interviews as my primary methodologies. The quantitative methodologies complimented my qualitative approaches. I began this process informally in summer 2007, making myself a regular fixture at the Italian American Social Club and found that this preparation made it quite easy to transition into the official data collection phase of my project, which began in March 2009 and lasted through summer 2010.

I opted to use non-probability sampling and specifically respondent driven sampling for the selection of my interview participants. I have chosen this type of sampling because, as Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) suggest, this method is ideal for labor intensive study and a small number of cases. My project is designed to address how Italian Americans identify themselves, how they position themselves along the spectrum of Whiteness and in order to understand this process it is necessary to undertake intensive
study. Some drawbacks of this type of sampling are that because of the small number of participants there may not be a broad scope of opinions or perceptions represented, I am limited in regard to the claims that I can make with my data (can’t apply claims to the larger population) and I may not be exposed to all viewpoints or opinions that are represented at the Club.

The four methodologies I utilized are as follows: participant observation, cultural domain analysis, social class surveys and interviews.

Participant Observation - I employed participant observation as a formal method and as Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) suggest, observed similar events over an extended amount of time in order to determine the reliability of results. It is integral to understand how this community interacts, the power dimensions evident, and how ethnicity and class are manifest physically. Participant observation allowed an up close observation of various elements of anatomo-politics. I conducted participant observation at the Club as well as outside of the Club over the course of a year and a half spanning March 2009-August 2010. I became a member of a bocce league that meets weekly, for approximately three hours each week (although for one season I participated on two different bocce teams and played bocce two nights each week). I have participated in this league for two and a half years, one of which I collected official data. I also attended Club meetings which are held the first Tuesday of every month and last approximately one hour, with additional time afterward for socializing. I also spent a considerable amount of time at the social club itself, several hours each week either sitting at the bar and observing interactions, eating dinner at the restaurant or attending the weekly karaoke event which was held on Thursday nights.

In addition to these recurring events, I also attended various functions and celebrations held at the social club. At least once a month there was some kind of event
such as: a spaghetti dinner, a dance or some other event to bring revenue to the Club. I
interacted individually with a group of ten to fifteen key participants by several hours
every week or every other week with them outside of the club (shopping, sporting events,
birthday parties, baby showers, San Gennaro, the RenFest, etc). During my most
concentrated period of data collection I spent several hours a night several nights a week
at the Club, for several months. After, I reduced it to once a week with an outside event.
I relied on the outside events especially during the summer months when the bocce
league was no longer in session.

The majority of my participants are in the middle age bracket (40-60s) although a
few are in their twenties or thirties and a few were older (70-80s). Nearly all of the
participants are official Club members, and if they are not members then they are
associated in some way with the Club. I tried to obtain data from an even number of
male and female participants. The participants that I interacted with in my participant
observation and those that I interviewed identify as Italian American. However, I did
collect data from participants that did not identify as Italian American yet were still
associated with the Club. These participants completed the cultural domain analysis as
well as class questionnaires. They provided an element of contrast for the opinions and
perceptions of Italian Americans.

Cultural Domain Analysis - In order to operationalize definitions of Whiteness, to
analyze how they are manifest in everyday interactions, it is necessary first to ascertain
what categories are in use within the community and also the relational
aspects/comparative qualities between Italian Americans and other categories such as
White or Caucasian. I utilized cultural domain analysis in order to tease out these
categories and base line definitions. Free lists helped to determine initial assumptions. I
asked participants to list words associated with larger themes such as: Las Vegas, East
Coast, West Coast, New York, Chicago, Italian American, Italy- Southern, Italy -
Northern, White, Caucasian, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant etc. This comparative measure (of providing another White ethnic group to compare to Italian Americans) assisted in understanding how informants organize constructs such as White and Italian American. How do they define/situate items in categories? What are the categories? Including physical attributes such as skin color demonstrated how participants rank various dimensions of anatomo-politics. These strategies are vital in understanding underlying assumptions and constructions of categories. I utilized the free lists to demonstrate if Italian Americans and other ethnic groups perceive there to be a difference between Northern and Southern Italian culture. I used a broad sample of participants for both the cultural domain analysis and survey work (sixteen participants, drawn from the Club and bocce league). I did ask every bocce player to complete a cultural domain survey (approximately 100-120 players). After I found that most people were reluctant to complete a five page form and were often occupied and/or distracted playing the game of bocce I had to revise my strategy and recruit participants using convenience sampling only after I had asked each player in the league to participate. I started asking whoever was in close proximity at the time and I relied on my primary research participants to help recruit and recommend other participants for this phase of the project. I also held open participant recruitment by verbal announcement at several of the meetings to recruit participants. Asking each bocce player and announcing my study at Club meetings allowed me exposure to a wider range of the population and allowed everyone a chance to be informed about my study and the option to participate. For this section of my methodology I recruited participants of both Italian American backgrounds as well as other (self described) ethnic backgrounds in order to gauge an understanding of the pervasiveness of stereotypes of Italian Americans as well as a comparative measure for Northern/Southern Italian differences. It is important to note the diversity of participants that were recruited for the cultural domain analysis and class surveys. Some were
directly associated with the Club and actively participate, some were members some were not, some were very loosely associated with the Club. The bocce players comprised a larger representation of Las Vegas, a research population possessing different age, ethnic, Club membership and occupational demographics as well as where they were originally born and raised. Club meetings were more representative of a specific research population: middle aged or retired Las Vegas Italian Americans. However, it is important to note that there was differentiation in this population as well, in regard to if they were Italian American or Italian (born and raised in Italy) in addition to where they were originally born and raised (outside of Las Vegas).

Surveys - This dimension of the study addressed the issue of class. Bourdieu developed an intricate method for unraveling the various dimensions of class. Bourdieu deconstructs French class structure, by focusing on aspects representative of class such as: practices, lifestyles, gender and politics. Bourdieu’s framework can be utilized to differentiate between the various class dimensions evident within the Italian American population I am studying. His methodology includes in depth questionnaires centered on class differentials: knowledge of art, literature, film etc., which can be used to evaluate various dimensions of class within the Italian American community. I pared down his methodology to better accommodate my much smaller sample size. Though I collected extensive data that divided the population by different realms of class, I was only able to analyze the data that pertained specifically to class assumptions and perceptions associated with the physical realm. Due to time constraints I had to readjust the amount of data that would be included in the thesis and thus focused primarily on class in the physical realm. The same participants that responded to the cultural domain analysis also responded to the class surveys.

Interviews - Interviews were essential to my project for several reasons such as to situate the study, to examine the family as a structural element and in order to understand how
Italian Americans conceptualize Whiteness it is important to address the issue of discourse. I am utilizing the term discourse in its most basic format, a dialogue or form of communication. Discourse is where agency may be exercised. Following this framework, it is essential to address the issue of discourse. How do Italian Americans speak of Whiteness? How do they speak of ethnic identity? I selected informants again, from respondent driven sampling. I focused the majority of the sampling for my qualitative data on my key participants. I relied on my key participants. These are the participants that I got to know the most over the course of the research and they referred me to their friends and relatives for interviews. However, not all of my qualitative data was sampled in this fashion. I made several oral announcements at Club meetings to recruit research participants. This was an open invitation for anyone that would like to participate. In this way, I was able to interview participants who were not directly in the social circle of my research participants. Also, I interviewed participants that were not Club members, but that participated in the weekly bocce matches. As mentioned previously, I did ask all bocce participants in the league to complete a survey. I recruited a few interview participants in this manner. Those participants that expressed a deeper interest in my project opted to participate in an interview rather than complete a survey. I kept the sample size small, due to the fact that I anticipated gathering a large quantity of information and each interview intensely focused upon the experience of the individual; I interviewed fourteen people. The interviews were semi-structured and designed to gather basic demographic information, as well as life history. I also addressed specific topics involving ethnic identity and class aimed at finding out how individuals identify and define themselves in accordance to overarching structural influence.

I was unable to utilize the complete amount of data I collected. This was due to time constraints. I relied primarily upon the qualitative data for my project, yet there were still some significant cuts made to the amount of data that was actually referenced
in the thesis. The quantitative data was used to compliment the qualitative data. As discussed above, it was also necessary to pare down the class surveys and cultural domain analysis.

Interview data was used to investigate the difference in culture and physical perceptions between the Northern and Southern Italian culture. Cultural domain data was also used to compliment the qualitative data as well as provide alternate viewpoints and perceptions from other ethnic groups. Interview data was utilized to determine how Italian Americans are constrained by the bio-politics and anatomo-politics of both the census as well as the ideology surrounding the Northern/Southern divide. Interview data was also utilized to construct the broader realm of structural influence Italian Americans are subjected to, including the political economy of Las Vegas as well as ethnic stereotyping. Interview data provided insight into how the Italian American population is subdivided, the diversity that exists within the ethnic group, and also how Italian Americans perceive Whiteness in the broader sense and how they differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups.

Participant observation and detailed field notes were key in highlighting how middle class culture is performed at both the monthly Club meetings as well as through the act of matchmaking. The data contained in the class surveys, in particular the segment on physical indicators of class, provided explanation as to how Italian Americans and other ethnic groups perceive class in the physical realm.
CHAPTER 1

FROM THE ARRIVAL OF THE IMMIGRANT TO MANIFESTATIONS OF THE WHITE ETHNIC

D: Do you think it had a lot of association, a lot to do with socioeconomic class?

S: A lot of it does yes. Because as I told you earlier when Italians migrated to this country just like the Irish they were put into a regulated neighborhood that was closed off from the rest of the world and they were they took all the jobs nobody else wanted. And that was the jobs they did. Those jobs were construction and not really high positions in constructions then, usually ended up doing all the heavy labor work, all the concrete, ditch digging, all these type of jobs that nobody wanted that they would do because they did it to support their families because they wanted to be better off than where they came from. Even in the wages they were paid during those times were better than what they ever saw in their life so a lot of these people are, you know, they were peasants they were farmers and whatnot so they got their money through and their means through barter and trade and sometimes money and when they came over here, their visions that everybody was telling them that the streets are paved with gold here in America and when they got there they realized that was all a farce. And a lot of them were very disgruntled because of that so, it was very apparent in other cultures that came over here.

In the interview excerpt described above, Salvatore, a middle aged Italian American man explained to me his view on Italian immigration. The concept of the “American Dream” is very evident throughout his explanation why and how Italians were initially lured to this country. Over the course of the past century, Italian Americans have encountered much adversity. The majority of the immigrants possessed little educational
or American cultural capital; the Southern Italian immigrants were deemed racially inferior by both American standards as well as Italian standards; and they also encountered extreme financial and social hardships in their new homeland. However, Italian Americans have made significant progress in terms of forging a path into the American middle class lifestyle, obtaining cultural and educational capital and negotiating a way outside the boundary of the “racially inferior.” Over the span of only a few generations Italian Americans have, essentially, “become White,” according to most theorists and according to American racial categories utilized by the census. But are they really? And what does Whiteness imply?

In order to fully acknowledge and appreciate the distinct cultural composition of Las Vegas Italian Americans, it is necessary to situate the experience of Italian Americans in a historical context. To facilitate an understanding of the fluctuating circumstances that led to the establishment of this ethnic group in Las Vegas, it is important to first build upon the foundation of the broader scope of their experience in the United States. Therefore, this chapter is devoted to a brief discussion pertaining to the experience of Italian Americans in the United States, beginning with the mass migration to the United States during the early twentieth century.

Demography of the Immigrant Population

A compilation of factors prompted the vast migration of Southern Italian and Sicilian immigrants to the United States, which occurred primarily in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth. Perhaps, on the broadest scale, the most significant factor was the extreme poverty of the Southern Italians. The unification of Italy placed the Southern Italians under the rule of those from the North,
who had acquired a loathing of Southerners. Humbert Nelli (1983) stresses that the unification of Italy brought many economic advantages to the Northerners and kept the South in poverty (23). The government seemed to ignore the largely agricultural South and only promoted the interests of the Northern citizenry. Nelli claims that living in the Mezzogiorno during the 1880s equated to living in Ireland during the potato famine of the 1840s (1983:22). Nelli asserts that immigration remained the only source of upward mobility, during that time period, for Southern Italians (1983:26).

The Southern Italians were considered to be primitive savages to the Italian government and the majority of Northerners, who did not want to associate with or identify as fellow Italians. The South was in fact called Low Italy, and the North was called High Italy (Mangione 1992:74). This was no doubt a reference to class, education and various other separating factors. Most Northerners in America wanted to separate themselves from the Southern Italians and forge separate identities, providing a proper representation of Italians in their new homeland of the United States. They were embarrassed to be associated with the Southerners, whom they viewed as inferior. Many Northerners considered Southern Italians to be \textit{un altra razza} or a of a different race (Mangione 1992:147). These stereotypes of Southern Italians continued to proliferate once they had transitioned to their new country. Some stereotypes of the Southerners included images of knife wielding thieves and beggars (Mangione 1992:158). Other stereotypes of Italians were physical; they were deemed “swarthy” complexioned and they were described as having a low forehead (Alba 1985:67). These descriptions are comparable to images of apes.
In the years of mass migration before WWI and after 1880, eighty percent of Italian immigrants came from Southern Italy (Nelli 1983:19). They immigrated from various provinces in the Mezzogiorno, which included Sicily and all Southern provinces south of Rome. Roughly four-fifths of Italian immigrants hail from Southern Italy (Saija 2006:39). The immigrants originated from a variety of provinces; however, they began their trek with the same intention, to escape the hunger and poverty that prevailed in their homeland of Southern Italy. A smaller number of Northern Italians had established themselves in America prior to the migration of Southerners. The majority of Northern Italians migrated to other countries, such as Canada and several countries in South America, besides the United States.

**Arrival en Masse**

Italian Americans have developed a their own niche within the tapestry of American ethnic identity. Now that they have become Americans, the immigrant experience itself is part of the mythology of American ethnic consciousness. Italians arrived, primarily from Southern Italy, in large numbers. This mass migration was spread across the years of 1880 to 1920. Many of the immigrants were fleeing a dismal economic environment back in their homeland. The political economy was so dire that it became the catalyst for what would become known as the largest scale of migration of Italians before or since this time period of the early twentieth century. Another crucial factor in the mass immigration process was the availability of passage to the New World. Various ports throughout Southern Italy offered passage to America, in particular the port of Naples, which was the port with the highest percentage of immigrants destined for America and the port that offered direct service to New York (Nelli 1983:33).
America was perceived to be the land in which one could achieve, transition, become anything. It was the land of endless opportunity. Stefano Miele, an immigrant in 1900, explains his reasons for coming to America: “If I am to be frank, then I shall say that I left Italy and came to America for the sole purpose of making money…..If I could have worked my way up in my chosen profession in Italy, I would have stayed in Italy. But repeated efforts showed me that I could not. America was the land of opportunity, and so I came, intending to make money and then return to Italy” (Nelli 1983:42). The first arrivals from Southern Italy were young single men who sought out economic opportunity and usually found work in manual labor upon their arrival. Many Italian Americans stayed in America only for a short period of time before returning to their homeland. After this first wave of unmarried, male immigrants, families began to migrate as well. They were the last installment in the mass migration of Southern Italians.

So strong and urgent was the desire to make it to America and be able to stay after the difficult journey, some Italians could not face deportation if they were not accepted as citizens. Immigrants who were rejected at Ellis Island often threw themselves into the water and tried to swim away or commit suicide (Mangione 1992:115). These stories coincide with the experience of Lenny, one of my research participant’s, great grandfather. Lenny relayed the emotional story of how his great-grandfather and other relatives survived this journey and the immigration process. His story is not unique, in the sense that nearly all of my participants have told similar tales of hardships that their ancestors faced. These stories have become family mythologies and have instilled a great
deal of ethnic pride and a sense of gratitude for those who have came before them.

Lenny explains:

L: And you’ve got the Italians, that we’re all supposedly mafia with the mustaches. But you know yeah some of that stuff did happen but that’s not how most people were, most of them hard working and did everything for their family I mean I can go back to my great grandfather did, my great great grandfather the stuff they did just to survive here, just to come over.

S: And then being deported and coming back.

L: Yeah, twice he jumped off the boat. He was here my great grandfather yeah. My great grandfather who was illegal and he got caught, they got him on the boat to send him back and he jumped off and came back and they caught him again. Back on the boat, jumped off again and then came back and finally he was getting up there in age and he decided he wanted to go back and visit the family in Italy for the last time while he was able to and they told him once you go you can’t come back and he actually had to petition Congress to become a citizen and they actually got it done, I wish I could find that document but it was actually done by the Congress and he was able to go and come back. But he was here for so long, it was a while.

Once Italian Americans had been able to establish a successful path through the migration process, they began populating the United States. They were concentrated primarily in the Northeast, with population pockets in the Midwest. The majority of the immigrants settled in the East or Midwest, although there were small pockets that established themselves in the West in the states of Washington, Oregon, California, Colorado and Louisiana (New Orleans). This population pattern remains today. The
states with the highest concentration of immigrant settlements included New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and in the Mid-West Ohio and Illinois (Nelli1983:41). New York housed such a large population of Italian Americans during the mass migration that “in the years before WWI, New York housed more Italians than Florence, Venice and Genoa combined” (Nelli1983:63). Most Italian American immigrant neighborhoods were located in the inner cities and contained crowded tenement housing structures, with quite sub-standard living conditions. These living conditions caused a battery of problems including crime and rampant disease.

In New York, ethnic enclaves were at first so specialized that they clustered immigrants together that had resided in not only the same region or village, but the same location of a village (Mangione 1992:130). When they first arrived, the immigrants settled near others from the same province or town, but as time wore on they began to intermingle with others. It did take considerable time for the cultural barriers to break down, however. New immigrants sought out assistance from older more established immigrants and often received this assistance in the way of housing and employment. Lenny, a middle aged Italian American man, explains this process of helping newly arrived immigrants:

*L: They did anything they could to get by. He would do handywork, he’d go downstairs or go in the back and they’d grow grapes and make wine, I wish I could get that recipe too. He could only remember it and he would make wine from scratch and sell it to neighbors and family or whatever, he did everything he sold balloons, I mean it was just amazing some of the things they did, and it’s amazing that they survived you know.*
Grandkids and aunt and uncles that I have, they helped other people that came from Italy and they would stay with them and help them get started. It’s just amazing.

S: They were all from the same town so they’d help them get their feet on the ground and get situated until they could move out.

L: Neighbors and stuff that would come over, they would do the same thing. That’s why, I kinda look back at that and have to be grateful for everything that they sacrificed. It’s just amazing.

Most immigrants faced notable hardships, especially in regard to transitioning from an agricultural/rural setting to an industrial/urban way of life. During the time of mass migration, the U.S. was in the midst of a transition from a largely rural or agricultural subsistence to industrial power. This provided the need for a massive amount of manual laborers in the urban areas. The Italians provided this labor source. A city official commented in 1890 that “we want someone to do the dirty work: the Irish aren’t doing it any longer” (Mangione 1992:138).

The immigrants focused on finding work, and often times children were taken out of school at a young age to assist their families. Women, contrary to cultural norms, were also placed in employment, often in factories. Lenny further details the types of jobs available to Italian immigrants, and the stereotypes associated with them:

L: They had all the dirty jobs that the other people didn’t want. There were times that we were considered not smart enough because we didn’t know the language, they were, if you look at all the stereotypes that were out there the only things we could do were: cook, make pizza, entertain, uh you had the stereotypical Italian woman that’s heavy set with the big long dress with the apron and the hair pulled back.
Furthermore, Salvatore granted me the insight on an Italian American’s reflection of the immigrant process and all that it entailed, including how it fostered a sense of identity for Italian Americans today:

S: I guess it’s just the charisma that the Italian American culture has and what they’ve been through over, in history ‘cause if you read back in history you’ll know that the Italian American culture, they were treated very poorly when they came to this country in the early 1900s, very similar to how the Chicanos were treated when they would come over from Mexico into this country, they’re for lack of a better term, very bluntly speaking, they were treated like dogs. They were like the dirt of any group, they were isolated to their own neighborhoods, and they were not very, they were treated very disrespectfully and the Anglo populace of our country at that time, especially in large urban areas would relay them to doing real mundane or real simple jobs that others would not do. So, which is very similar to how migrant workers would come into this country today, it’s the correlation is very similar which that I think gave a lot of this culture, this ethnicity, a lot of pride too, ‘cause they were hard working people and the majority of them all they wanted to do was make a better life for themselves as they were coming up in a new country ‘cause a lot of these, 90 percent of all the immigrants that came over from Italy they were dirt poor, they had nothing, they couldn’t speak English very well. They had to learn English as they went along and they were just treated like third class citizens so it was a struggle, it was no different than when the Irish came over from Ireland they were treated exactly the same way. It’s amazing that our culture which was based on English or Anglo-Saxon history, that settled this country would make a reversal and turn against those that, they want people to come here and live and prosper.
but yet they would be prejudicial in that way and treat these people the way they did because they couldn’t speak English. I think that’s what today, I mean Mexican culture has the same problem so I mean it’s really sad and it’s a prejudice that doesn’t have to be there it’s just that people are afraid to see things for what they are and they’re afraid to be open minded about that and that’s been the problem with Italian Americans from the beginning coming to this country and that’s why a lot of them went into crime, because they couldn’t make money legitimately, they wanted to be prosperous, they took the easy road out, which was not necessarily easy.

Italian Americans were subjected to intense scrutiny, stating it mildly, beginning with their arrival in the United States. Many Americans felt threatened by this new type of immigrant, originating from southern Europe, whose folkways and customs were often vastly different from the norm. Xenophobia steadily rose, and the new immigrants were subjected to prejudice, discrimination, hatred and often physical violence. Stereotypes of the Southern immigrant proliferated. “..To the vast majority of Americans ‘foreigner’ is synonymous with the popular conception of the immigrant as a poor, ignorant and uncouth stranger, seeking for better luck in a new land” (Speranza 1974:289). The mafia, or myth of the mafia, provided Anglo Americans a convenient way to scapegoat Italian Americans, which lead to discriminatory practices against the new arrivals. Anglo Americans had been exposed to the mafia through news reports from Italy as well as from the immigrants (Gambino 1974:268). “At the beginning to southern Italians’ immigration to the United States, reports about the arrival of the Mafia, Camorra, and southern brigandage in general abounded” (Bertellini 2005:212). As has been demonstrated throughout history, when a population feels threatened by another ethnic
group, usually when there is a rapid influx in immigration, racist ideologies abound. A New York Times editorial from the late nineteenth century echoes this sentiment: “Those sneaking and cowardly Sicilians, the descendents of bandits and assassins, who have transported to this country the lawless passions, the cut-throat practices, and the oath bound societies of their native country, are to us a pest without mitigation” (Gambino 1974:256).

Although Italian Americans faced extreme hardships upon their arrival to the United States, some did not fit the stereotypical manual laborer slum dwelling immigrant. Others, upon their arrival were able to apply ingenuity and escape the circumstances that surrounded so many of their fellow countrymen. At the turn of the century there was an improvement in mass transportation which allowed immigrants access to housing outside of the slum dwellings because they were able to travel from work (mostly in the inner city slum areas) to an outside residential dwelling (Nelli 1983:71). Northern Italians in San Francisco were considered to be a model immigrant community. They were able to establish themselves in professions that did not require heavy manual labor and were able to transition beyond the working class. Nelli also acknowledges that there were Italians in New York during the mass migration era who were able to establish themselves in professions such as building contracting, business, law and medicine (1983:74). However, the majority of the immigrants were restricted to the bottom socioeconomic ladder and found work in construction or factories (1983:75).

Italian Americans were not all manual laborers. They were found in many different realms of employment. Michael La Sorte (1989) asserts that immigrant populations need to be examined and considered divorced from the often assumed
hierarchy of employment, which pegged Italian Americans at the absolute bottom of the heap. He claims that this oversimplified construction needs to be reexamined because the complete experience of the immigrant group is being denied. He declares that there were multiple opportunities and that immigrants were represented in a variety of jobs (La Sorte 1989:86).

La Sorte examined census documents from 1910 from the area of Port Chester, NY. He found Italian Americans listed under a variety of occupations, including physicians, clergymen, engineers and gardeners (1989:86). Although represented in a variety of fields, most Italian Americans were employed as laborers. La Sorte makes the point that although there was a concentration of Italian Americans in manual labor, it is important to recognize that they were able to become successful in a wide variety of other fields, often described as white collar professions. It is important also, to consider age upon arrival to the new country as well as intention to stay and establish roots, versus return as a sojourner (La Sorte 1989:89). La Sorte sheds light on other aspects of the immigrant experience and provides strong support for the need to incorporate the broad scope of the immigrant experience when examining mass migration, rather than the standard poverty stricken, ethnic enclave urban dweller.

After WWII, various economic opportunities came to Italian Americans by way of the G.I. Bill. They were accorded the opportunity to attend college and with loans from the Veterens’ Administration were able to leave the old neighborhoods and migrate to the suburbs (Nelli 1983:173). Most attribute the start of assimilation represented in the second generation to their exposure to American social institutions such as public schools
and learning English which created a barrier between themselves and their immigrant parents.

Some Italian Americans were eager to become American. They anglicized their names, no longer spoke Italian and moved away from fellow countrymen (Mangione 1992:224). Author Mario Puzo explains the great gap that existed between the immigrant generation and their children. He contends that as an adolescent he felt ashamed of his parents and greatly disagreed with their value system and outlook on life. He saw a world beyond living day to day (Mangione 1992:227). There is a transition apparent between the second and third generations. Nelli argues that third generation Italian Americans are attached to the ethnic quality of their heritage that their second generation parents tried to suppress (1983:175).

Italian Americans were able to successfully negotiate around many of the pitfalls of new immigrants in order to firmly establish economic success in their new homeland. Although subjected to discrimination, with language being an easy marker for discrimination, Italian Americans were able to achieve social mobility. In the areas of income, occupation and education, Italian Americans have reached greater levels of success than many other ethnic groups (Juliani 1987:63). They made the transition from primarily working class positions to the field of white collar professions. “Italian Americans have relatively recently arrived in the economic middle class and are increasingly successful in it” (Gambino 1997:283). Even though they do not have a large upper class, Italian Americans’ income on average is 15-20% greater than the national average (Mitrano 1994:139). Italian Americans receive bachelor’s degrees at a rate over the national average (Gambino 1997:283). This is very different from the rates of
illiteracy that were reflected in the immigrant population at the time of the mass migration. During the mass migration, the U.S. Congressional Immigration Committee found that roughly sixty-eight percent of Southern Italian immigrants were illiterate (Sturino 2006:51). In addition to education, the rate of business ownership is seventy percent higher among Italian Americans than the national average (Gambino 1997:283). As it is with many other ethnic groups, with each successive generation raised in America, there is less of the original cultural patterns and traditions carried over. “Social mobility and cultural assimilation are clearly related experiences” (Juliani 1987:67). Though they have found much economic success in their new homeland, I must ask the integral question: Are Italian Americans White? If so, were they always considered to be White?

Whiteness Emerges: Emergence of the White “Other”

There are not congruent depictions of Italian Americans as White. Some theorists, such as Thomas Guglielmo (2004) assert that Italian Americans were considered “White on arrival” and thus were granted all of the privileges this category encompasses. However, others such as Louise De Salvo (2003), argue that Italian Americans most certainly were not considered White upon arrival, or if they were categorized as White on paper, this most certainly did not play out into actual practice. Theorists such as Thomas Guglielmo (2004), stress the differentiation between race and color and that while Italian Americans were discriminated against based on race, they were not discriminated against on the basis of color, as they were classified as White from their very point of arrival in America (Vecoli 2006:97). His argument is centered on the fact that Italians did not face institutional racism. They were not restricted in terms
of housing, marriage, employment, and many of the limitations that other ethnic groups faced because of their categorization as White. However, they were subjected to racial discrimination. They were not outright barred from many of these institutional structures (legally, on paper) yet they were still discriminated against and faced violence and prejudicial caricatures of themselves, specifically those of Southern Italian heritage.

Guglielmo also distinguishes between color and race. Still, it appears another kind of ethnic category, in regard to skin color, was created to pertain especially to Italian Americans. Richard Vecoli (2006) maintains that Italian Americans were most often described as swarthy (96). The additional category of “Mediterranean” was also considered as a separate racial grouping for Italian Americans.

Similarly, my research participants present differing views on whether Italian Americans were considered White on arrival. Isabella, a middle aged woman of Sicilian descent, replied to the question “are Italian Americans White?”

I: Well, I think that they’re Caucasian, um I would say so you know these days you just don’t know what Caucasian means anymore, if you go back to that it’s just a milieu of people you know you have Germans with Sicilians, Germans with Northern Italy, you would have you know English people marrying African Americans so it’s just a milieu of different things.

Fabrizia, a elderly Northern Italian woman fosters a similar viewpoint:

F: Well okay now the Italian race is as you know is White okay. Now after WWII I will say even during as you know the Americans came up from Sicily and a lot of babies were born so you have a lot of mixed races and most of them came to the United States. But I
guess some remained there and then now we have in Italy now we have almost one
million Muslims living in Italy now.

Adriana, a middle aged Italian American woman, does not hesitate in her reply to my
question:

D: So are Italian Americans White, using that term in the larger sense of the American
ideology surrounding White, the category of being White, in your opinion?
A: Sure.

Christian, an elderly Italian American man, responded in the same way:

D: Do you think Italian Americans are White in the larger category, the term of, an
American mind or idea?
C: The real Italians you’re talking about though?
D: Italian Americans in American. Do you think they’re considered White as a term of
how it fits in the American mind of being White?
C: Yes, yes.

Salvatore further illustrates why some Italian Americans feel the need for differentiation:

D: So, in your opinion are Italian Americans White? Like the category in this country?
S: I would have to say yes. They don’t like to admit that but yes, they are.
D: Now why do you say that they don’t like to admit that?
S: Because they like to be separated from themselves in their own identity but if you go
in to fill out a job application or some type of government form and you have to identify
what you are they, I’ve known some people that actually write in the word like and I’m
like “oh that’s crazy” I said “you’re White” Caucasian, you know, there’s no place to
write Italian in here so and it’s kind of funny but that’s because of, that’s a part of their

culture they feel like they are separated as separate culture from other people. I find that to be rather arrogant to tell you the truth.

I said if everybody did that, that means everybody who has like a quarter of this, or a quarter of that in their ancestral pool is going to write in a long sentence who they’re related to, what they are. So that means I can write down Irish, Italian uh Native American, or whatever I want you know what I’m saying I could write Heinz 57 down there but that’s just the way, I mean an example of what some people think about themselves in that particular thing.

There is a contention between the former viewpoints discussed and those of both theorists and Italian Americans who maintain that Italian Americans were most certainly not considered White on arrival, and in some respects may not still be considered fully White, and may not desire to be labeled as such.

Italian Americans, since the time of their arrival, have occupied a distinctive niche within the American racial classificatory system. Often, there was not a specific category that could contain them adequately. They more often than not had to ride the line between color, between race, between identities in America. According to Robert Orsi, David Roediger and James Barret, Italian Americans were “In Between Peoples” in the American racial hierarchy (Vecoli 2006:96). They represented the niche between Black and White. Many of the racial epithets hurled at the new immigrants were taken from the racial classificatory system already in place in the United States. In 1890 a railroad construction boss was asked if he would consider an Italian a white man, to which he replied, “No Sir, an Italian is a Dago” (Nelli 1983:preface). These racist terms positioned Italian Americans in close association to African Americans. Terms such as guinea were
also used for antebellum slaves who had been kidnapped from that area of Africa and
*dago* was taken from the Spanish Diego (Vecoli 2006:96). These terms placed Italian
Americans alongside other established minority groups in the United States.

There is also evidence that at times Italian Americans were much nearer the racial
categories prescribed to African Americans. The racist beliefs of the Northern Italians
melted to the racist beliefs espoused in America during that time period. Southern
Italians were subjected to numerous pejorative stereotyping and were virtually on the
same plane as African Americans. Northerners would also often claim that “Africa
begins south of Rome” (Vecoli 2006:96). The ideology surrounding the Northern and
Southern divide began in educated circles and trickled downward to the mainstream
public. Northern Italians, in an attempt to divorce their culture from Southerners,
claimed that Southerners were not Italians but Arabs (Vecoli 2006:96).

Artist Claudia Demonte (1992) explains that growing up Irish Americans
considered Italian Americans to be Black and called them “niggers” (Mangione 1992:
221). In the American South, Italian Americans often mingled socially with African
Americans and sometimes lived in close proximity (Nelli 1983:53). Vincenza Scarpacei
(1980), in her study of Sicilians in Louisiana, found that they socialized and intermarried
with African Americans, thus bringing them closer to the Black than White aspect of the
American racial classificatory system (Vecoli 2006:99). Around the time of the mass
migration, it has been documented that Italian Americans were lynched in Mississippi
(Mangione 1992:129). They were not viewed as White by the native population,
especially in the Southern states. Southern Italian immigrants did not fare much better in
the West. They were also subject to scrutiny, discrimination and racism. In Nevada they
were viewed as direct competition for mining positions and in Washington State they were seen as “Dark People” who were a direct threat to the established population (Mangione 1992:191). They were subjected to cruel caricatures in local newspapers throughout the nation, oftentimes represented as subhuman with overly emphasized racist physical features.

It is in one of these areas of the country, that one of the greatest attacks against Italian Americans occurred, an example of unrestricted racism. An incident at the forefront of xenophobia against Italian Americans occurred in 1890. The superintendent of police in New Orleans, who investigated cases of extortion in primarily Sicilian neighborhoods, was shot to death. Although this crime remains unsolved to this day, Italian Americans were still victim to a wicked onslaught of slander, racism and murder. The media was also at the front lines of this event, adding fuel to the fire against Italian Americans. “The paper reported that 325 swarthy looking, jibbering foreigners were taken to the stationhouse” (Gambino 1974:255). The prisoners were beat, shot or hung by a mob of leading citizens of New Orleans, who screamed for vengeance for the superintendent’s murder. The police made no effort to intervene and no one was ever held accountable for the murder of eleven prisoners (Gambino 1974:356). One would think that most people in would be horrified at this act. But most the Americans at the time supported this behavior. “While some Americans and newspapers condemned the lynching and other assaults against Italian-Americans in New Orleans, many condoned it, including Theodore Roosevelt. The tone of those who approved illustrates the first major manifestation of the Mafia image and the problems it presents to Italian Americans” (Gambino 1974:256). The media created stereotypes of Italian immigrants,
dehumanizing them. “An article in the Popular Science Monthly of December 1890 was
typical. Entitled ’What Shall We Do with the Dago?’ the article went on to allege a grave
threat to all decent Americans posed by Italian immigrants, who, according to the bigotry
of the time, were cast as stiletto-carrying dagos” (Gambino 1974:255). Although Italian
Americans were the victims in the New Orleans incident, they still were held accountable
for the murder of the superintendent and were subjected to continuous abuse thereafter.
“Popular opinion could link Italian Americans to crime as a result of historical memory
of the notorious New Orleans lynchings” (Bondanella 2004:174). There was no
sympathy for the real victims, the murder victims; instead this unfortunate incident
caused the victims to be viewed as the oppressors.

There were also other resemblances between the racial situation of African
Americans and Italian Americans of that time period. Richard Vecoli maintains that,
similar to African Americans, some Italian Americans tried to pass as White (2006:97).
They were subject to such discrimination, along the lines of employment and even dating,
that many decided to hide their ethnic identity and immerse themselves into the
mainstream White American culture. Other Italian Americans would emphasize this
Whiteness in order to differentiate themselves from minority groups or people of color
(Vecoli 2006:100). Fred Gardaphe, a second generation Italian, explains how ingrained
was the delicate sense of “Otherness” throughout his childhood and that he loathed any
reminder of his Italianness, going so far as trying to rid himself of darker skin by staying
out of the sun (Gardaphe 2006:68).

Louise DeSalvo (2003), in an article in which she explores her family history and
broader themes regarding the meaning of race and color maintains that Italian Americans
were considered Caucasian by immigration categorization, yet were not considered to be White in their everyday life experiences. They were White on paper, only metaphorically, not literally. DeSalvo describes a picture of her grandmother that is on her naturalization documents. She is a very fair complexioned woman. However, though she is classified as White in color, she is classified as dark in complexion. DeSalvo speculates that this complexion classification was put in place to maintain the boundaries between “desirable” European immigrants and “undesirable” European immigrants, such as Southern Italians, who were primarily associated with peasantry and lower-class.

“She had to attest that though she was White she was not completely White for she was also Dark. There was not one white race; there were several and some were not as good as others…..Dark made its implied meaning clear: my grandmother had become ‘racialized’” (2003:27-28).

Constantino, a middle aged Italian American man of Sicilian heritage agrees with DeSalvo’s estimation of Whiteness:

D: So do you think historically in America, Italian Americans have been considered White? Like in the same sense of Anglo-Americans

C: I would say generally speaking through the history of America, probably not.

Rachel, a middle aged Italian American, woman explains that while Italian Americans are considered White, they would rather be grouped under Italian as a category:

D: So in your opinion are Italian Americans White? In the larger category of American ethnic categories? Would you consider Italian Americans White?

R: Hmmm (agrees) but I think they would be quick to tell you that they’re Italian

D: Okay so quick to….
R: Yeah.

D: Do you think that most people would rather be identified as Italian than White?

R: Hmmm yeah I think so.

Lenny more adamantly protests Italian Americans being considered White upon arrival:

L: That’s kind of a loaded question. It’s gotten more towards the Italian Americans being White but if you go back even to my grandfather’s day we weren’t considered White. If you go even farther back, it’s even worse. We do the jobs that nobody wanted. I can remember stories of my grandfather having a really hard time finding work because he was Italian and he was because he was quote just off the boat that you know he did the dirty jobs. I remember he was selling balloons in the alley. Walking down the alley selling balloons, selling wine out of the house that he made to the neighbors to make a living. It’s gotten a lot better but you still have that stigma that you’re really not White.

Over the span of the last century Italian immigrants have successfully adapted to a new American culture and their descendents have become Italian Americans. The racial ideology that existed in Italy carried over with the immigrants and fused with American racial ideology. Italian Americans, upon arrival to the U.S. were considered to be not quite White. Although they have achieved economic success and have transitioned well into American culture, they are still, at times, considered to be of a different status than Anglo-Americans. This separation shall be further discussed in chapters five and six. Italian Americans demonstrate many different perceptions of White identity and this diversity illustrates the fact that the census categories, which define Italian Americans as White, are much too simplistic and do not reflect how the population actually identifies.
Now that a historical foundation has been established, in regard to Whiteness and class, the remaining chapters shall focus on how Whiteness and class interact within a contemporary population of Italian Americans. Clearly Whiteness and being labeled White in America are not straightforward concepts. These topics shall be readdressed further along throughout my study. In the next chapter I shall provide an introduction to the Italian American Social Club of Nevada, my primary research site and construct a detailed picture of the membership and culture that exists within this distinctive niche of Las Vegas.
CHAPTER 2

FINDING THE FOREIGN IN THE FAMILIAR: THE SETTING OF THE STUDY
AND THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER IN THE FIELD

Standing alone as one of the original buildings on East Sahara, along the dividing line between city and county jurisdictions, lays the Italian American Club of Southern Nevada. The Club exhibits quite a notable presence. Possessing baroque style architecture, a completely white exterior of cinderblock and artificial rock as well as two Roman style statues, it definitely stands out among the less distinct surrounding buildings. The Stratosphere is a prominent landmark, always visible in the distance; I saw it like some foreshadowing ghost, reminiscent of old Las Vegas and a by-gone era. The Club was a real presence, somehow defining the boundary between downtown and the rest of the Strip, the old, the real from the contrived. This was part of old Vegas and the Club remained as a stronghold where some of the last vestiges of White ethnicity in this modern era are still evident. It was at this social club where I became privy to the lives and culture of a particular group of Las Vegas Italian Americans.

Encased within this unique milieu of Las Vegas I began my research with the intention of investigating the interrelated dynamics of ethnicity and class and, specifically, how these distinctions are manifest in physical appearance. On a warm night in August, after the weekly bocce match, I had gathered inside the Club for an evening of socializing with my key research participants. We whiled away the time, eating, drinking and regaling each other with Las Vegas ghost stories. Gabriella was laughingly telling us the tale of when she caught a ghost on film, at a cemetery when she was on a “ghostly tour” of Las Vegas. Gabriella and her parents then began to actively
assert that the Club itself was haunted and they further speculated as to who exactly was haunting the Club. Was it a former manager? A ghost of a long dead gangster rumored to still haunt the halls? Gabriella informed us that all of the kitchen staff swear experience with the paranormal, while they are alone and there aren’t any patrons present. Afterwards she dared Jimmy and I to walk through the deserted banquet room, with its walls of mirrors, past the stage and follow her into the cavernously dark back room of the Club, the rumored epicenter of the supernatural activity. Jimmy and I accepted her dare, and on that summer night we were not privy to any of the supposed nightly high jinks of the resident ghosts. However, this theme of ghosts and hauntings resonated. I found myself joining the ranks of the few chosen children (young adults) of the Club running through the night searching for legends, stories and ghosts. I wondered then if fading
ethnicity is a ghost itself. Perhaps ethnicity itself is trace, a ghost pervading the minds and memories of those who have lost it.

There is often the assumption that those White ethnics who have crossed the class barrier and are now fully fledged middle class Americans no longer retain a sense of true or authentic ethnicity that they have “sold out” or assimilated entirely. I have found among my participants that there is an ideal, and perhaps a desire to locate “undiluted” culture, “authentic” culture and I wondered if this is universally applicable to all ethnic groups, or if it is indicative of those who feel that their own sense of ethnicity or ethnic identity is deteriorating over time. Micaela di Leonardo (1984) asserts that many theorists perceived White ethnics, who were not working class and who resided in the suburbs, as assimilated and being without ethnicity or those who have lost their ethnicity (25). Similarly Salvatore LaGumina (1988) contends that Italian Americans that reside in the suburbs have been largely ignored by scholars. He further explains that there is not complete assimilation in the suburbs as many previous popular models on ethnicity maintain. Rather, “immigrant groups have survived in subcultures outside the cities” (3). His study of ethnicity in the Long Island suburbs demonstrates that ethnicity is maintained in an active fashion which provides the assumption that there is some agency allowed in maintaining culture and tradition. Everything does not vanish with a move to the carefully manicured lawns of suburbia. It is important to consider how social space (location within the city) is constructed and how this affects ethnic identity.

This study is unique in the fact that it provides an examination of a ethnic group which has been largely ignored in the regional context of Las Vegas, with the exception of Alan Balboni’s work on Las Vegas Italian Americans, Beyond the Mafia (1996). In
this book Balboni provides an in depth portrayal of Italian Americans’ work and lives in Las Vegas from the city’s inception as well as how they have contributed to the city as a whole. My study is centered on a group of middle class Italian Americans who reside in various locations throughout the city. Thus, this study can be deemed a community study in some ways, while in others it deviates from this pattern. It is my intention to provide a picture of the Club as a point of reference, a place of connection for Las Vegas Italian Americans. However, my research demonstrates that these Las Vegas Italian Americans are by no means completely similar, for they come from a variety of education levels, background experiences and class positioning, as well as residing in disparate areas throughout the city.

The first section of this chapter situates the research community and site. The second part of this chapter centers on how I as an anthropologist fit into the research community. I outline the journey of a fledgling anthropologist. How did I search for ethnicity in the suburbs and how did I find the foreign in the familiar? One day in November of 2009 I invited one of my colleagues to have lunch at a local Italian American deli, Siena Deli, located near the research site and much recommended by participants. Although I had visited the restaurant/deli before with participants, my colleague had not. We walked through the door and experienced a small slice of disorientation, or a mild case of culture shock. My previous visits to the restaurant had always been accompanied by someone who was familiar with the cultural terrain. My colleague and I stood for a hilarious ten minutes debating over what to order and in the process trying to decipher the menu, which was in Italian. This experience highlighted the fact that ethnicity is, indeed, alive in Las Vegas, if you look for it. There is no
amalgamation of culture so great that all traces of each individual culture vanish. Culture is ever present, and my research shall demonstrate that middle class suburban Italian Americans do not lack an “authentic culture.” It is still present, and though modified from the original culture of the first immigrants, it remains.

In this chapter I assert that research (and inevitably study results) are directly related to the experience of and read through the eyes of the anthropologist, who holds a unique position as a social scientist. For it is exactly the social aspect that provides a point of departure from fellow scientists neatly contained in their laboratories and other white coat settings. The world, people and experience without boundaries provides the laboratory for anthropologists. In this chapter I discuss the history and interrelated relationships within the Club as well as how I as an anthropologist fit into the structure, the distinctive niche of the Club.

The Club

The Italian American Club of Southern Nevada, better known as the Club, stands alone on East Sahara as a representation of old Las Vegas. While the Club is considered to be a non-profit organization, a social club, it is not restricted to members only. It also boasts a bar, restaurant, meeting rooms and banquet facilities that are open to the public. The form one uses to apply for membership emphasizes a common bond for Italian Americans, culture, and that the Club provides an ideal forum to connect and reconnect with others of the same cultural background. “Join the Italian American Club and meet friends from the old neighborhood. Many of our members are from New York, New Jersey, Chicago, Cleveland and other cities across the U.S.” (IAC membership form). Through highlighting specific locations where there are high concentrations of Italian
Americans and where much of the Las Vegas Italian American population has formerly resided, members can construct connections with the past and old neighborhoods. This connection is symbolic in a way and similar to the ideal of immigrants imagined communities.

The Club allows people to construct a sense of community, which is often missing in the transient city of Las Vegas. As there were never any White ethnic neighborhoods that developed in Las Vegas, the Club serves as a basis for connection. While most members reside in suburbia and drive into the heart of old Las Vegas to attend Club functions, it is evident that the location of the Club itself provides a metaphor for community, in a city that many deem far from the treasured memories of their old neighborhoods and communities Back East and elsewhere. There are various Club events that are organized around this concept of creating a sense of community. Examples of these events are the weekly bocce games, Club meetings, karaoke night, Club dances and observance of religious holidays.

The Club, what is there to say about it? It is the hub of many personal and professional relationships, all intertwined. It is the home to various constituencies representative of the Italian American community in Las Vegas. The Club is a site to create and maintain communal ties in a transient environment. The bar and banquet room, the Sorrento dining room are all privy to the day to day lives and conversations of a particular group of people that frequent the establishment. Although the majority of the patrons are regulars and members, there are also the outsiders, still very welcome, that can be found lingering about in these same rooms. Superficially this may seem a warm or picturesque environment, and in many ways it is. My long term involvement within the
Club has given me the perception, allowed me to be privy to the emic point of view and I have often become enmeshed within the drama that occurs behind the scenes to which most outsiders remain oblivious.

The Club was the first Italian American ethnic organization in the Las Vegas Valley. At its inception, in the early 1950s, it included Italian American men from all different regions of Italy and Sicily as well as from many different locations around the United States. At this time Back East, many Italian American organizations still confined membership to those from the same background or locale in Italy (Balboni 1996:106). The Club served to bridge the disparity between the North and South, as well as the many differing regions, by providing an avenue to commune as Italian Americans, rather than promoting specific regional identities. It is interesting to note, however, that this may have been a point made in theory, but may not have always been reflected in actual practice. One of my research participants, a middle aged Italian American man named Constantino, has been a long time affiliate and supporter of the Club and during my conversation with him he illustrated that years ago, these lines were still drawn among Club members:

*C: Personally 25 years ago when I walked into the IAC and when I was a young member in the Club when people would stand up and they’re a new member they would say you know I’m Joe Batchapo from New York and my family’s from Rome all the Romans and the Northern people would clap and I would say that I’m Constantino (surname), my family is Sicilian I could hear people booing and you know when I [ became more involved in Club politics] I made it clear that that would not be tolerated anymore. This is a time when we’re, we all migrated from different parts of America to Las Vegas and*
this is one club over here and if we hear any kind of bullshit, we’re gonna throw you out of this club and this is it, it’s not how you welcome paisans. Paisan means more technically that you’re from the same town or village but in general speaking, we say we’re paisans because we’re Italians and we seem to get along. People from Naples can’t boo people from Sicily that’s that was years ago, that was generations ago. I think that a lot of that’s gone now, we still hear all kinds of little jokes and innuendos and stuff, the fact that Sicily is geographically this close to Africa um that ah a lot of the Northern Italian people like this they’ll make jokes like that Black guy’s you know like one of your paisans.

This excerpt demonstrates some of the dividing lines that were, in the past, present amongst members. Upon my first introduction to the Club I was informed that “all Italians do not get along, you will have problems in this area.” So, apparently, there were already some boundaries drawn between Club members and often arguments ensued. There are many other divisive factors that differentiate the various constituencies at the Club. These range from politics, socioeconomic level and long standing friendship cliques. I negotiated between the distinct lines that were drawn between the various constituencies at the Club.

Oftentimes many of these means of differentiation were steadily evident at Club meetings. These various constituencies and divisions amongst members shall be further discussed in chapter five. Many of these divisions could be observed during the monthly Club meetings. Meetings are held in the banquet room, which can easily transition from a business type of environment to a festive and informal environment. I have provided a description of this environment, as it is a cultural space and the stage upon which many
of my observations were made. During 2009, the year in which I conducted fieldwork, the Club appeared quite different than it does now. The following description pertains to how the Club appeared during that time period. There is a rectangle of fluorescent square lights circling the ballroom. In the center there is gilding on the ceiling and a chandelier hangs down, complete with faux candles. There are also four blue lights and four red lights that are turned on for special occasions such as dances. Ornate wallpaper covers the three walls of the ballroom. It is beige and has circular designs. The walls surrounding the wallpapered sections are beige. There is a large wooden dance floor in the center of the ballroom. The fourth wall is actually the stage area. The stage has deep burgundy curtains and takes up the entire width of this fourth wall. There are two large speakers, approximately five feet in height, maybe two in width on either side of the stage. There is a large American flag on a stand on the left side of the stage.

Many of my conversations with participants, and most of my participant observation occurred at the Club, especially in the bar and the Sorrento dining room. I would often take in the familiar sight of the dark lacquered bar with marble accent, the long mirror spanning the entire length of the bar directly behind the bar and the low burnt sienna colored ceiling. There is a tv positioned on the wall on the left side of the bar. There are ten large seats composed of faux leather that are positioned directly in front of the bar. There are two curved/arched entry-ways leading into the Sorrento dining room. There is a green wall to the left of the bar, leading into the kitchen. There is also a small stage on the far left side of the room that is encased in burgundy curtains and carpeting. There are also three smaller round tables covered with white tablecloths lining the walls that separate the bar area from the dining room. There is also a large jukebox to the far
right of the room, and it is always turned on and filled with mostly an older variety of music (e.g. jazz, Sinatra ballads 90s pop music such as Mariah Carey’s Daydream album). The bar has a deep burgundy popcorn ceiling. There are several pictures of Italian landscape on the walls as well as a large picture of Frank Sinatra on the right wall behind the bar. There are two ceiling fans with four lights in each fan pointing different directions. There is a large wooden cabinet to the left of the cash register as well as a black marble lacquer counter spanning the length of the bar, approximately 20 feet. There are also several wooden cases or cabinets to the center and right of the bar. There are glass shelves that contain various bottles of liquor (I noticed the standard Ketel One, Grey Goose and Smirnoff among others) as well as drinking glasses. There are straws, Equal and salt carefully arranged in empty Campari containers. There are also nuts, which patrons claim to be “very salty.” There is also a small piano on the stage, which is utilized several nights a week when the Club hosts live performers. In the center of the bar is a large gold antique espresso maker, which I assume is solely for the purpose of decoration. There is a baseball cap on top of it that says ROMA. I have never seen the espresso maker used before. The Sorrento dining room houses approximately seven white clothed tables in each of its two adjoining rooms. This description details how the Club has been preserved throughout time. The Club has maintained its look and feel, that of a cultural landmark in Las Vegas. The atmosphere of the Club promotes a feeling or nostalgia for old Las Vegas.

Formerly, the Club boasted a Mediterranean style garden in its backyard, along with several bocce courts both of which are no longer there. (However, there are ten bocce courts in the public park directly behind the Club). There are current plans to
revamp the Club’s backyard and include an Italian themed wedding courtyard for patrons who wish to hold their wedding receptions at the Club. Some members view the backyard as representative of the Club itself: aging, somewhat neglected by younger members, fast becoming a relic encased in memories. Adriana, a long time associate of the Club, explained her view regarding the Club of the past as well as what may become of the Club in the future:

A: Yes my mother initiated me into the club when I was 18 years old. So I was 18 I was the youngest member on the bocce team and I was playing, I don’t know if you walked into the club Danielle and you walked down that corridor where all those pictures are, my mother’s picture is there, [mother’s name]

D: Oh I’ll have to check that out

A: And she was the vice president of the women’s auxiliary, I was part of the women’s auxiliary years ago also but so there’s a lot of history there you know with the Club and me and but down that aisle I would say probably, I would say a good 60 percent of the people there are now deceased and many of those people were all old time bocce players that I played with.

D: So what changes have you seen in the Club itself over that large span of time, I mean I’m sure there have been lots

A: There have been lots just in the general management but they’re now making some changes to the inside of the building upgrade the inside. The changes, well we used to have a women’s auxiliary, so you had the men’s club and the women’s auxiliary that supported the men’s club and so they did away with the women’s auxiliary maybe about four or five years ago as well and so now it’s a co-membership so it’s men and women in
the Club. And so that was a huge change for the Club and the other thing is in the backyard of the Club I don’t know you’ve walked through there they have two bocce courts back there and at one time you could go to the Club and it was just beautiful, the backyard it had the grapevines with the overhang, the courts were maintained they had big barbeque pits where we used to go out there and they used to have a lot of their functions in the backyard. And you could sit under the overhang and there were grapes falling down, just like you would see you know in an Italian picture or something it was very picturesque and over the years they just let that go down the tubes because of they didn’t have the people to maintain it. You have to remember a lot of the members there, even today, are old members. They are getting on in age so the people that were very active in years gone by they were the ones that did all the work, such as my mother. They were the workhorses of the Club. Now they’re deceased or too old and a lot of the younger generation, members of the Club don’t want to take that responsibility on for whatever reason. And I’m not saying that’s a bad thing, I’m just saying that’s what happened. So it’s unfortunate that the Club isn’t doing well enough to bring some people in to develop the backyard again because it was really a very nice place to be. I think that would attract a lot of attention. Some other changes in the Club, you’re talking about the Italian American Club right? Unfortunately they don’t have a lot of younger people.

D: I know there was discussion that I’ve heard amongst various members that they wanted to generate more interest and bring in younger people and they had all these different plans to bring in some college students and stuff like that but I guess it fell through or certain other members didn’t like that.
A: Well nobody knows how to organize it as far as I’m concerned because my mother when she was alive she belonged to numerous clubs, Sons of Italy, Italian Catholic federation all of those clubs and she always drag me with her so and the demographics of these clubs, they are older and as much as they try to bring the younger kids in they just don’t want to participate. I had no choice, my mother made me. And when I you know when my mother says you’re coming to the meeting, you go to the meeting. So and my daughter was also very active until she moved to [out of Las Vegas]. But I think it’s a common thread throughout all the ethnic clubs you know whether it’s the German American or whatever they just don’t have the next generation of kids to participate. And a lot of these clubs are actually closing down.

D: That’s too bad.

A: Yeah, it really is. So you know I think that we’ve done our part you know my mother brought me in, I got my daughter there. When she comes to town she participates but it’s not enough we need to get more people in to keep it generated and it’s just not there.

There is much detail in Adriana’s explanation of the Club. She emphasizes that many ethnic organizations are experiencing rapid decreases in membership due to both the aging of current members and no new recruitment of younger members. The building and backyard of the Club are representative of this lack of involvement.

Adriana also explains that there used to be the existence of a separate ladies’ auxiliary that was associated with the Club. Several years after its formation, the Club included a ladies’ auxiliary. The ladies’ auxiliary integrated many spouses of Italian American men, who were not of Italian decent themselves, and welcomed them to participate in Club activities (Balboni 1996:106). Eventually these two branches were
merged into one. There are several other Italian American organizations in Las Vegas. The Sons of Italy, Las Vegas branch, was formed several years after the Club. The Augustus Society was formed in 1983, with membership fees set at $1000.00 a year in order to attract a certain socio-economic class of Italian Americans (Balboni 1996:120). The Augustus Society was focused on promoting a positive image of Italian Americans and providing scholarships to Italian American students. These three organizations share some of the same members. Both the Italian American Club members and the Augustus Society have voiced a desire to assist needy or lower income Italian Americans. However, it is has been difficult to identify this segment of the population as most Italian Americans are included in higher income brackets (Balboni 1996:122). At a recent meeting of the Club, several members voiced concern over returning to these ideals of helping the less fortunate. It was suggested that the philosophy of the Club should be centered around philanthropy and that members should help “needy Italians” that have been laid off their jobs during the current financial downturn.

Some members of the Club, such as Nico, Carla and Gabriella, position other Italian ethnic organizations into a classed hierarchy, with the Augustus Society at the top. Italian American Club members I have spoken to have often balked at the membership fee required to join the Augustus Society:

D: *So in your opinion, do you think there’s a strong sense of community in regard to ethnicity, Italian American ethnicity, in Las Vegas?*

C: *Yeah I’d say so. What do you think?*

G: *I don’t.*

N: *No?*
G: No. They don’t see each other much out here.

N: Well, if it isn’t with the Club, you know.

G: Right, right. Well I was just thinking that’s not really a community.

C: Yeah, well it is, but it isn’t.

N: It’s commercial um

C: It’s nice that they have the Club, I don’t know how many they have, I only know of two.

G: But we don’t have that much of a membership.

C: We used to.

G: Yeah.

C: But they died.

D: So what is the other major one?

C: Um Augustus hmmm. And I don’t think they have the membership that we have, they have a smaller membership because it’s a thousand dollars to join a year.

G: Augustus.

D: And what would you say is the average age of the members in the Augustus Society?

N: Over here?

G: 50-60s (Older people?)

D: So they’re all about the same age?

N: Yeah, yeah.

This interview excerpt also demonstrates that these three interviewees, a middle aged couple and their daughter, recognize that the Club may not provide a complete sense of community, yet it still provides some semblance of a community. Also, the discussion
amongst Nico, Carla and Gabriella highlights the fact that there used to be a large membership at the Club. But since many members have passed away and not been replaced by new members, membership has been steadily decreasing. Also, in their opinion, the average age of members in these ethnic organizations is within the senior citizen age bracket.

Although Club membership soared throughout the years of the 1960s and 1970s, no more than five percent of Italian American adults in Southern Nevada have ever belonged to the organization (Balboni 1996:111). According to Alan Balboni, most new Club memberships were obtained through community contacts in the 1970-80s. The ideal new members would be friends or associates of established members (1996:113). However, this strategy offered little room for growth as it placed constraints on the age range of members and unintentionally denied the inclusion of younger members to the Club. By the late 1980s, many of the local Italian American ethnic organizations, including the Club, were losing their vitality. As the membership population began to age, and younger members were not frequently recruited, they, as with many ethnic organizations in the United States, began to face extinction. Members do recognize the need to recruit younger members. However, there is often discord regarding the best way to go about doing so. My opinion was often requested on ways in which to generate interest in the Club among the college age bracket. While some members are active in devising ways to encourage enrollment of youth, others resign themselves to a more hopeless attitude, because they figure if their own children won’t join why would any other young people? While attending one of my first functions at the Club, a member informed me that he asked his son why he didn’t join the Club to which his son replied,
“why, why should I?”

There is a movement among certain constituencies at the Club, particularly the middle aged (40-50s age range) to preserve the Club and their heritage. Lenny, a member of one year and his non-Italian wife Susan explained to me their objective for joining the Club:

S: *Hopefully they will take the best from each generation and send it into the next generation and kind of keep the tradition alive and still remember how they got along.*

L: *That’s the reason why I joined the Club you know I don’t want to forget this, you know my dad passing, my grandmother passing, my family on one side, they’re getting up there in age and pretty soon it’s gonna be me, and that one scares the hell out of me and two somebody’s got to keep these memories alive so my son and his kids and his daughters and everybody else will remember all this stuff. You understand that you didn’t get here having all of this, somebody sacrificed down the line for all this, that what kills me because it’s all being lost.*

It is evident that there is intense sentiment and emotion behind Lenny’s decision to become involved with the Club. Lenny expresses a similar mindset when brainstorming ideas for how to generate interest in the Club, preserve its legacy and increase membership:

L: *This place can make money, it absolutely can.*

D: *There were some ideas they were talking about like how to draw in like I’ve helped them with the college and stuff how to advertise.*

L: *It’s just if there really is 350,000 Italian Americans here they need to know about this place and I’m working on that, I’m seriously working on that.*
D: Well they were talking about getting a Facebook page for the Club.

L: That’s a good idea, [man’s name], the guy that donated the $50,000 blew me away and I mean I went up to him and thanked him for that and said you have no idea what that means to me, coming into this and he says well you’ve got to do me a favor, Lenny you can write well see if you can get this place to be a historical site in Nevada and get us some money too. Still I’m working on it, through some connections I’m concentrating a lot of angles on what I want to take this and through our work we’ve got channel five and there’s a lot of stuff for World Children’s Day and I can’t remember, Rachel Smith? One of the anchors on channel five does a lot with our stories and I want to get in touch with her and see if they can help me, shine a better light on this place rather than Oscar’s Mob Museum downtown.

S: Right.

L: I’m still thinking of writing him too, and saying you know what? You got a bad rep for this how about helping us out with this place here and maybe this will help balance out some of your thing so I’m working on this.

Lenny’s hopeful outlook is a representation of third and fourth generation White ethnics’ desire to preserve and maintain as well as reconnect with their ethnic backgrounds. Assertion of ethnic differences also provides a sense of uniqueness, especially in the West, where culture is often perceived as much more converged than in the old ethnic neighborhoods Back East. “Overall, Italian American organizations are faring well considering that third and fourth generation Italian Americans are so thoroughly assimilated. Italian Americans are indistinguishable by their behavior from the general population. Their speech, dress, and mannerisms no longer set them apart from the
majority of Americans” (Balboni 1996:124). Balboni further asserts that organizations such as the Augustus Society may be more appealing to third and fourth generation Italian Americans due to the business connections they provide. Yet strictly social clubs, such as the Club, may face a more uncertain future as their membership population continues to increase in age and is not replaced by younger members (1996:124).

Only the future shall reveal the fate of the Club and similar organizations. The members and dynamics between members is further discussed in chapter five. The next section addresses how I, as a researcher, fit into the fusion of people that comprise the Club.

Enter the Neophyte

During one of those sweltering Las Vegas summer days, when most of the city is in hibernation from the heat, I gathered my courage and made my way to my first introduction at the Italian American Club of Southern Nevada. I dressed very carefully in a well planned outfit consisting of my own conception of business casual yet with a youthful twist. I really had no specific plan on what I would say, I did not map out any “selling points” or specific course of action, no business plan to guide my introduction. I had no idea who I would happen upon, what sort of people I might encounter at this location. All I had was myself, and my much used black business binder (I thought it looked more professional than a backpack). I had no letters of reference or references of any kind; I was without introduction. I did not know any members, or really know much about the Club itself, other than the fact that one of my professors had told me there’s an Italian American club/restaurant in town and that it might be a good idea if I poked
around and saw where it could take me, what possible avenues might be available to assist in my research.

So, it was with only my own courage to guide me that I left the startling sunlight and immersed myself in the cool dark environment of the Club. As soon as I entered I was hit with a blast of cold air, thankfully, as I was trying hard not to sweat profusely out of both nervousness and the heat outside. I stayed in the entryway for a few minutes, taking in all of the pictures that lined the walls, which I would later be told that members referred to as “the wall of dead people.” I noticed that there were several different sections of the Club: a banquet room directly to my right, a hallway off to the left side and to the right the entryway to the bar and the Sorrento dining room. I wandered into the bar and eventually someone came out to talk to me. The first person I came into contact with was the former manager of the Club, Bobby.

Bobby was a petite man, dressed in casual black slacks and a button down dress shirt. He also wore large glasses that deeply magnified his eyes. He had a crop of curly hair and appeared to be in his sixties. Since I had no specific plan on what I would say once I entered the Club, I launched into a quick description of myself, my education, my association with UNLV, and my goals. Bobby seemed to be quite interested and asked me several questions pertaining to my research. He invited me into his office, and we talked some more. I found it somewhat interesting how easily this process was unfolding. I had expected to encounter some resistance, as I was a stranger walking into this establishment, but I would find everyone I encountered to be open and receptive to talking to me.
I left that day, with a more sound idea of what the Club actually was. Bobby had informed me of the best time I could stop by, when the members and, in particular, the officers would be frequenting the dining room. In those early days, before I actually became a member of the Club myself, I would often be told to “come on in around this time…” or “so and so should be in around this time….I think you should talk to them…” It was really through each new introduction that I made more contacts at the research location. Once I had established myself as a legitimate researcher, or as I was more often seen because of my youthful appearance as a student, I had no problem adding to my contact list because of the generous references members provided me.

It was only later on, during the most intense phase of my data gathering, that I realized not everyone may have been received as easily into the community. I was frequently asked “so who are you related to?” or “who do you belong with?” I was often asked if some of my participants were my family members or friends. Many times I was met with surprise and disbelief when I told whomever asked me about my introduction to the Club that I had, literally, wandered in off the street. It seems that in order to make your way into this community, an introduction by way of a member is necessary. However, that was not the case in my experience. Some Italian Americans would describe the community as being guarded and difficult to infiltrate. Perhaps a most salient example of this is when a new Club manager was introducing himself to the members at a meeting. He was not closely associated with any established members and was not previously a member himself. We watched as the new manager was nearly ripped to shreds by one particular member who badgered him with questions, forcing him to describe his motivations: “And you are..?” Others also appeared to be somewhat
suspicious. This was an indication that for the most part, the Club is an open society yet in some respect a somewhat insular society.

I would often ask myself: what is it that made them talk to me? Why did they trust me? And aside from the fact that everyone I encountered had been so open and willing to share their lives and stories with me, and this openness was often explained to me as being a cultural trait inherent in Italians, I still wondered how I was perceived by the research population. Class, race and gender carry immense weight as to how a researcher is perceived and more often than not provide the parameters as to how data may be collected. And I would find, throughout the course of my research at the Club that I was in no way immune to the effects of these confining social constructs.

Race, Class and Gender in Relation to the Researcher

Micaela di Leonardo (1996) in White Lies, Black Myths delivers a searing portrayal of American race relations. As she traces how deeply Americans are regulated by racial prejudices and stereotypes, she provides evidence that the ideology surrounding race is indeed a regulated structural body which constrains the population to such an extent that it is a believed and accepted notion and is often never questioned. This leads one to assume that we are often blind to our own confines of privilege and constraint. Told through personal reference, the larger political body of the United States, as well as race relations throughout the halls of academia, di Leonardo illustrates that racial ideology, in specific the beliefs pertaining to the “underclass,” are ingrained so deeply into the population that, perhaps, even amongst those who study these issues, there may never be an escape. Race, class and gender are so indelibly tied together and this forceful
trinity so influential in our perceptions of others that only in acknowledging our own positions in society may we begin to understand how these perceptions are melded.

Anthropology is a discipline that, from the beginning, has prided itself on both cultural relativity and the power of transcendence, meaning the ability to transcend beyond the familiar environments in which we have known throughout our own lives, and experience the realm of “The Other.” In recent times this realm has shifted heavily into what was once territory delegated almost exclusively to sociologists: contemporary urban American populations. Throughout my research I have found a distinctive niche of the “foreign in the familiar” existing in Las Vegas. There is a broad depth of culture continuously at play, if one looks past the mundane veil that encompasses, yet often blinds one to these differences. For there is, in essence, a sharp contradiction in terms between the reality we see or experience and the reality that exists.

Di Leonardo provides support for the argument that we, even as anthropologists, are deeply embedded within the structural constraints that influence other members of the population. She declares herself a “hologram of American racial tension and interracial harmony, of class privilege and ressentiment, of feminist triumph and female victimization” (1996:54). Her brutally honest discussion of American racial politics and her equally honest assessment of her various positions within the web of racial politics is a paradigm for the necessity of recognizing one’s own position, or positionality, while conducting research. The power of perception is, at times, overpowering and in order to conquer, or at least curtail, our own biases it is mandatory to garner a sense of perception beyond the self, yet inclusive of the self while conducting research. This holographic point of view, as di Leonardo describes throughout her article, garners one the ability to
empathize with those of a different culture. As anthropologists we may never hope to “become” or fully experience the culture of our participants, there is still room, and still hope, for perception beyond the confines of our own experiences. Di Leonardo’s article undoubtedly calls into question our own conceptions and challenges these predetermined constructs, further highlighting that researchers are not immune to the constraints imposed upon “other” members of society. Only through recognizing the fact that we who study structure and agency are also heavily regulated by the structural constraints of race, class and gender and that these elements of regulation often play out in the realm of anatomo-politics marked directly within the body, may we shift past these structural barriers to understanding beyond. What of the race, class, gender conundrum in regard to my research? Acknowledging the power of perception is an integral part of field work and so I have studied not only my perception of my research population, but their perception of me as well.

Gender

During those early days introducing myself to the community, I can remember a feeling of absolute euphoria. I was mesmerized by the process and transition unfolding. I felt I was on my way to becoming a fully-fledged anthropologist. I will never forget a compliment one of my participants paid me my first or second time attending a gathering at the Club. He told me that I had the personality to do this research that people would, undoubtedly, have no problem opening up to me because of my personality. I always remember this, and coupled with the heady mixture of acceptance and openness I myself encountered at the Club fully instilled in myself a confidence that I was on my way to discovering my own career path: to become an anthropologist.
At the center of anatomo-politics lies regulation of the population through physical appearance. Race, class, gender and even physical attractiveness or unattractiveness are all constraining factors that affect the body of the populace on a daily basis. Throughout my experience as a researcher, the crossroads of race, class and gender provided me a standpoint through which to observe how I am constrained by anatomo-politics. Perhaps the most constraining factors, while conducting research, were gender, age and perceived level of physical attractiveness.

The roles most relevant to my experience were the roles of student, which denotes youth, and that of a friend or honorary family member. The role of student was most frequently referenced by community members and participants that knew me only on an acquaintance level. The fact that many community members assumed that I am younger than I actually am (they often mistook me to be an undergraduate upon our first meeting) made the student role much more informal than that of a graduate student or professional student. This role also minimized any element of an authoritative nature that the role of researcher might bring to a setting: I was much less intimidating as a student or college kid than as a researcher. This student role connected me to youth, and assumptions of youth, yet it did not completely define who I was. This particular role granted me a way into conversation with participants I might not be too familiar with. Being a student became more of a concept of what I did rather than who I was. These participants viewed me as a college kid finishing up school and my experience and progress in the program became points of interest in everyday conversation, similar to how one would inquire about someone’s job. The student role provided a way for participants to relate to me, as
I got to know some of them they often recounted experiences and stories of their college years or would tell me stories about their children who are in college as well.

I was also viewed as a friend, community member or honorary family member, in some instances. In many of my interviews participants have stressed the importance of family and the family structure in Italian culture. This emphasize on family is also often broadened to the larger community of the Club. Everyone, in some way, is interested in everyone else’s lives. This is demonstrative of an inclusive community. Most participants wanted to present the image of a warm, welcoming and family oriented environment. It is through this type of environment that my role of community member, friend or family member began to emerge. Several times I was introduced, in jest, as “my granddaughter” or “my niece” by older community members. I also found myself describing some of my participants in a similar fashion, “she is like an older sister,” or “he’s my adopted brother.” Oftentimes when I first met a new participant they would assume that I was somehow related to one of my key research participants or else another Club member. The more time I spent with my key research participants the more I became accepted as a community member. I was viewed in a daughter type role. There are numerous examples of how I was viewed in this role. Many of my interviews and participant observation were conducted over meals. Most often participants would argue with me, as they do their own children, over paying for my meal. Another example is when several participants offered to go to the doctor’s with me when I was sick.

An additional example of how I was constrained by my age is the nicknames or informal terms that participants used to refer to me. Because of the fact that most people assume I am younger than I actually am, most guessing my age to be in my early
 twenties, rather than mid twenties, I was often viewed or treated as someone in this age range would be treated. Many times research participants would refer to me in what could be taken as paternalistic terms such as: sweetie, sweetheart, honeybun, or only in rare occurrences directly as beautiful or gorgeous. I realized that these names were meant as terms of endearment and they further illustrated my role in the sense of fictional kin: a daughter, granddaughter, niece etc. However I also recognized that these terms may have had another researcher up in arms. Nonetheless, it is precisely with the skilled social acumen of an anthropologist, as the social scientist that I must traverse the path towards the way of an objective standpoint.

Age was also emphasized in how regard to the depth of relationships that I developed with research participants. It seems that youth, or young people, naturally tend to bond more so than a younger person with an older person, due to common interests and life experiences. I found that I did bond more and develop stronger relationships with several of the younger community members. I found that gender did not restrict these relationships in the same way. I was able to develop relationships and communicate well with both male and female community members. I was able to access both male and female participants for all realms of the project. However, I did not during my participant observation, that on several formal occasions (such as dinners or Club event planning) that there was a segregation in accordance to gender. In these cases I was restricted to interacting with women. It is also important to note though, that this occurred only on specific occasions and was not representative of the majority of interactions at the Club.
Being perceived as a young, single attractive girl garnered many people with an element of protectiveness towards me as well, and possibly made it easier for members to approach me, made them more comfortable and at ease seeing me in this light, rather than as a staunch researcher. It added an element of humanity; I became relatable. Youth and perceived level of attractiveness granted me the ability to transition beyond the researcher role, and into the role of student, or to some members granddaughter, niece etc.

Some more humorous aspects, in terms of age constraints and differentials, brought about my own recognition of culture shock and personal bias. I found some of the more elderly male Club members to be quite flirtatious. I could now add being pursued by a few amorous elderly gentlemen old enough to be my grandfathers to my roster of experiences. This occurred several times, sometimes in jest or others it appeared, in earnest appreciation of beauty and youth. Finding myself quite shocked I would explain the circumstances to my primary group of research participants and defer to them as how to handle these situations, which were far outside my scope of experiences. I was often told to take it with humor, and I did, as these flirtations were not limited to me, but to other young female members and patrons of the Club, as well. Gabriella, one of my research participants closest to me in age, told me a joke about one of the elderly men that frequent the Club. She told me that I should not sit too close to him, or else he could get me pregnant. Joking about the virility of elderly men seems to be somewhat commonplace so after awhile I began to lose my discomfort.

Being perceived as a young single girl also situated me directly into the heart of what was important to certain participants: relationships and matchmaking. Matchmaking is a way in which culture and class are actively performed. The art form of
matchmaking, and its greater relevance to this study, shall be further discussed in chapter five. Matchmaking emphasizes how the community perceives gender and also how the community members interact with each other. There is often interest and curiosity regarding the love lives of young single community members. This led me to believe that it may be a cultural expectation to marry, or to marry young. This echoes the emphasis on family that many of my participants stressed during interviews. Due to my own age and marital status of single, I was often asked “do you have a boyfriend?” and “how can you still be single?”

The constant involvement in my love life caused me to designate one of my participants “the matchmaker.” There was often concern over who I was dating, if he was a good guy or who they could fix me up with, who would be the most compatible. For awhile, I lived in dread of being tapped on the shoulder and turning around to “we have a guy you just have to meet.” I played the part of the innocent, usually sitting there unawares, when I would be ambushed and then try unsuccessfully to protest to these match ups, and more times than not being dragged along and then having to explain to some poor confused soul that I could not date him because I was a researcher in the population.

Sometimes, these match-ups, while well intended, could end up with disastrous results. Such as the time when I was introduced to a young man who seemed nice enough, but upon further conversation I was shocked by several of his comments. Try then, negotiating your way around explaining to the women who have tried to fix you up with this young man, how to explain that he is rude and not alienate oneself from several Club members. This is important to note because usually offenses are not easily
forgotten. To demonstrate that at times I really had no say in these match-ups, on another occasion, one of the younger women stole my car keys while we were lingering out on the bocce courts (where most of these high jinks occurred). Try as I may, I could not convince her to hand back my keys so I could escape the impending introduction to a young man “you just have to meet.” Finally, I was able to convince one of the older women to hand me my keys, to which the younger woman rebuked her, “what kind of Italian are you?” Apparently matchmaking is a prerequisite for being considered Italian. Often, this same group of women would involve other male community members to play the role as father or grandfather and approve or disapprove the match-up. Also, the male community members would sometimes speak to the young men themselves, sometimes threatening sometimes encouraging them to talk to me. These matchups also shed some light on the issue of social class. Because of the fact that I did not end up dating any of the suggested men sometimes I was teased that I thought I was too good for them or that no one was good enough for me. One male member, in particular, took my polite yet firm decline of dates as outright rejections and proclaimed that no one stood a chance anyway because I am a spoiled little girl. I took this comment as relative to social class because this particular member did seem, at times through various comments made, to perceive me as being highly educated and thus less likely to want to date someone from a different educational or economic background.

These experiences demonstrate that, indeed, I was constrained by my age and gender. However, at the same time these two characteristics or categories granted me a pathway into the population. It allowed me to bond with other women close in age to myself, it allowed me privy to views on dating, relationships and gender and pulled me
inward towards becoming a fully fledged community member myself. Once I had observed that this type of matchmaking seems to happen frequently at the Club, I felt that in some way I had conquered the hurdle of being thought of as different or separate and had somehow found myself to be thought of as “one of the girls from the Club.”

Race

In some ways I found myself to be constrained in terms of my ethnicity or race, however this was more peripheral than the gender constraints. My racial background did not specifically impact my field work. However, it is necessary to include a discussion of my own ethnic background in order to illustrate how I fit within the cultural composition of the Club as well as to highlight my place as White or non-White. Often, upon meeting me, people are curious regarding my ethnic composition. They are never able to guess what I am and are usually quite shocked to find out my ethnic makeup. I did not find the research population to be any less curious, however, it did not seem to be a focal point of discussion. Many assumed that I was of Italian descent myself, especially considering that I possess a light tan skin tone and dark curly hair. Other times, they categorized me into Latin or Spanish origin:

A: So, what are you now?

D: I am actually half German, a quarter Welsh and a quarter Korean.

A: Oh.

D: Kind of mixed.

A: Oh.

D: What did you think I was? I’m curious.
A: No, I'm looking at you and no I thought that you could be a little bit Hispanic and but not Asian at all.

D: Yeah most people don’t get that at all.

I also found it quite distinctive that most people thought that I was European. Most people outside of the research population do not usually categorize me as fully European. Perhaps, this is because again, many assumed that because of my physical appearance and research topic that I must be Italian myself:

D: So in your opinion can you tell if somebody is Italian American by looking at them?

C: Oh yeah, oh yes.

D: Yes, okay.

C: You can even pass for Italian, really yeah.

D: Oh that’s a compliment.

C: Yeah.

Upon my first introduction to one of my research participants, he too asked me about my ethnic background and tried to guess what it could be. He thought that I was Italian and asked, “is he your dad?” regarding one of my other research participants. The participant assumed to be my father is often referenced by other members as having an “Italian look,” or “Southern Italian look,” meaning that he has a darker skin complexion and dark hair and eyes. The participant who guessed that he was my father could not believe it when I told him the truth; he thought that I was fully European. Despite the assumption that I am of European heritage, I am often met with amazement when people learn that I am of German heritage. This fact is an illustration that there are differences remaining between European American groups and that German Americans are still believed to be
fair skinned, fair haired and have light eyes, all of which with the exception of the light eyes, I do not possess.

Most participants would assume that if I was of Italian heritage, then I must be of Southern or Sicilian heritage. During one of my many conversations I had with a member while sitting at the bar in the Club, I was asked, yet again, about my own ethnic background and what drew me to the Club. Upon finding out my heritage the member exclaimed in surprise, “I thought you were a nice Sicilian girl!” And then confirms that I could pass for Southern Italian or Sicilian. These categorizations also drove home the fact that there is still some semblance of a recognized physical difference between Northern and Southern Italians present within the research community.

Class

On a particular Wednesday evening at the Club there was a varied assortment of over excited bocce players eagerly discussing, and at times arguing over the night’s final proceedings. Everyone was sitting or standing around the bar. I was engaged in a conversation with one of the younger members, Vince. Salvatore, a middle aged member that had helped me with my research tremendously and who was sitting directly to my right, took note of my conversation with Vince. After staring at Vince for a few minutes, he then leaned over and said “you better be nice to this girl, she’s a good girl, I know her well.” To which Vince promptly assured him that yes, he knew I was a nice girl and he treated me accordingly. Oftentimes I was told by my participants that I am a “good girl,” a “college girl,” or a “school girl.” Also, that if anyone ever bothered me they would look after me. This caused me to ask, what is, in essence a “good girl?” Further discussions with participants helped to illustrate the concept of a “good girl.”
I was told by several participants that I present myself well, that I am professional in appearance and demeanor:

A: …You know what they look like, how they are dressed, before you even get into the mechanics, you have to get to that point to where you have to you know, that’s the first thing you judge somebody on. Right or wrong. And that’s why you, Danielle, come across so nice because you’re always dressed so professional.

D: Oh thank you.

A: You look so nice and you’re always very pleasant.

On a deeper level, once participants had gotten to know me better they provided feedback on how I conducted myself, and in turn, was perceived:

A: Yeah, so there’s nothing wrong with that you know girls today are very out there in your face. I could tell that you’re a very nice young lady. I wouldn’t take an hour out of my day to do this for just anybody.

Another example is when during a conversation about dating, Gabriella, one of my participants, advised a young girl at the Club that she should always be a lady like Danielle with boys.

I also experienced a small slice of regulation by anatomo-politics in regard to social class. This came by way of manner of dress or clothing style. My own personal style fluctuated during my time as a researcher at the Club. I came into the research setting dressed in semi-professional, business casual attire, yet always with a youthful twist. Women would often inquire as to where I purchased my clothing and if I came to the Club directly from work. They were quite complimentary on my personal style.

Once I had become more accustomed to the research setting, I was able to dress more
informally, yet still with my own element of personal style. This element of personal style often included embellishment on my clothing as for many years I have designed and created my own jewelry as well as embellished my own jeans and t-shirts with painted designs and crystals. I found women at the Club to be quite receptive to this style of dress as well, and was often asked how I managed to complete the designs on my clothing, myself. This manner of dress was considered to be much more showy, flashy or “bling.” I found that different groups of women responded more strongly to my style of dress, depending on their own social backgrounds and what they considered to be the most stylish. Sometimes I found my opinion to be requested in regard to advice on clothing choices. One of the women at the Club was planning a trip to Italy and, while lamenting the process of packing, asked my advice on what outfits and shoes would be the best to include.

Style of attire also provided an indication of socioeconomic status or background. On one occasion I was complimented on my style by one of the women and she asked me where I buy my clothes. I let her know that I mostly buy my clothes from thrift stores. She was quite surprised. And then we launched into a discussion of thrift stores, and the best ones to frequent around the Valley. I make some recommendations and complimented her on her shirt, which she then felt comfortable to inform me she purchased at a $10 store. She also noticed my sandals which had intricate bead work and, coincidently, were purchased in Italy. She then explained that she liked my sandals so much because her style is more “bling” and she likes the bead work. Another example of class manifested through jewelry or clothing is when I would wear large crystal studded hoop earrings, which I wear nearly every day. My own mother usually calls my earring
choices “gaudy” so I was somewhat astonished to discover that many women in my mom’s age range at the Club admired my large, somewhat showy earrings. Similarly, discussions about discount retailers, sale shopping and general discussion of merchandise brands shed light on the specific levels of social class that are manifest through physical appearance.

I have found there to be a broad range of backgrounds and experiences among both patrons and members of the Club. Those that frequent the Club comprise a diverse group of Italian Americans, representative of many different realms of socioeconomic class, education and former locations of residence. Due to this diversity, I have found that adjustments were sometimes necessary for me, in order to make a participant feel at ease. There was occasionally a class clash between myself, “a college girl,” and a research participant with less education who may have been somewhat intimidated by my educational background, at the start of our association. However, here I found that youth was my ally and I was able to reflect back and forth between the roles of scholar and student. Oftentimes the student role offered more flexibility and I became easier to relate to, rather than the role of scholar or academic, which were less relatable roles.

Due to the perception of myself as a “college girl” my council was sometimes sought out for Club marketing techniques. It was complimentary that my opinion was considered when creating marketing for several Club venues. On these occasions several members would usually sit around a table and brainstorm the best advertisement for an upcoming event. I participated in two of these sessions: one to create an advertisement for general membership and another for the Halloween masquerade dance. I also noticed that many of the members participating in these sessions were those that had a college
degree and were employed in the education field. I was also asked to assist in establishing contacts, or providing UNLV contacts to the members to market the Club to college students. My opinion was also requested on ways in which to increase revenue by attracting a younger clientele base.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my experience with this community has allowed me to examine the role of the researcher and its effect upon the research community. I experienced firsthand the transitioning of the researcher into community member. The researcher role began to fall away to simply a student to simply Danielle, the person. I watched as these layers were peeled back so delicately to the point where my job there, my position with the university, were peripheral to the personal that I am, the person that they observed. Everyone plays a role in public, and everyone transitioned in to a role at the Club, as I did for them. I developed my pathway into the community, from an outsider with an etic point of view, to an insider with an emic point of view. I was able to develop more of an emic point of view as I was invited to specific functions that not all members were invited to baby showers, baseball games, birthday parties, weekly dinners hosted by a particular group of members, as well as organized Club events such as dances, meetings and the weekly bocce league.

The research population shall inevitably influence the researcher, as well. I have come away from this experience, taking with me not only wonderful friendships but also cultural characteristics. I have learned to become more expressive of physical affection with non-relatives as I had to become accustomed to the tradition of greeting and parting with kisses on one or both cheeks and lots of hugging, which at first violated my and
most Americans’ tenet of personal space. Now this tradition has become second nature to me, when at first I was a little bit uncomfortable. Also, I find myself gesturing with my hands much more to articulate a point, a characteristic many of my participants informed me is evident of Italian Americans. I also find myself repeating two phrases that I have often heard spoken: “It is what it is” and “What are you gonna do?” accompanied by the affable shrug. These are now phrases I utilize when I need a polite way out of an argument or a polite way to express exasperation. I have also concluded that my experience with the research community has instilled a great confidence within myself, and I am especially more comfortable with myself along the spectrum of femininity. The inclusion of perspective outside the realm of my experience thus far, in academia, provided me the necessary objectivity in regard to others’ opinions and critiques of myself.

I often noticed myself being closely guarded by members and treated, in a way, like family. I was never allowed to walk to my car alone at night, despite my many protests. I was often referred to in fictive kinship terms as “this is my niece” or “this is my granddaughter.” Further evidence that I had made my way into the community was when a woman had inquired as to why I no longer played bocce on Thursday nights. She said that they had noticed my absence and that someone had told her that I had moved Back East and was engaged. They had assumed I married a local guy and then returned with him Back East. Considering all of the little signs and gestures that I have become a member in the community, the hugs, kisses, concerns for my well being have made me feel very fortunate to be working in this community. Though I have collected data from these people, I certainly don’t view them strictly as research subjects, but as friends.
What does it mean to be truly accepted? How does one anticipate the standard reaction? Upon beginning this venture I had set very strict lines of separation between myself “the researcher” and the population I was studying. However, little by little as I became accepted more and more these lines began to fade and then become almost indistinct. I realize that, by the fictive terms as I was often referred, I was treated as one of them, as family. I had infiltrated the community so much so that I now abhorred the term *infiltrated*. I could not see myself as purely objective as I became involved in the lives of those I had opted to study. This is how anthropology is the discipline of the people. I have often stated that we are not scientists in white lab coats studying subjects in a sterile environment. The world is our laboratory, the people our subjects. As such, we cannot expect to be held to the same code of decorum as traditional scientists.
CHAPTER 3

QUESTING FOR IDENTITY: STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF INFLUENCE

Adriana was caught in the midst of explaining “Italianness” to me, animatedly emphasizing each concept with her hands, all the while flashing her long acrylic nails which were painted a subdued shade of red. We had been discussing one of my interview questions pertaining to stereotypes of Italian Americans. Adriana excitedly explained to me the various markers of identity: horns, malokya hand signals, outspokenness, a love of food and dancing….the list continued. These were just the recognizable characteristics outside of physical appearance. She even provided me with a humorous compilation of these traits complete with Italian American slang words, which was sent to her via email from a fellow paisan. This passage was perhaps meant to provide a means of reminiscence, a point of connection. She read the scenario out loud to me, as well as provided me with a copy. We laughed as she went down the list of characteristics. This conversation provided me with the insight that, indeed, stereotypes or ethnic models/ideals are still alive and ever present within the Italian American community. Perhaps the most evident stereotypes, both in regard to character as well as physical appearance relate to the Southern Italians or those whose ancestors hail from Southern Italy or Sicily. Why is this so? And how is this ideology manifest in the everyday lives of Las Vegas Italian Americans? Does it still resonate as soundly today as it did in the past? The intention of this chapter is to deconstruct these stereotypes, in specific those relative to skin color and other physical markers of differentiation that indicate the divide between the North and South. Also, I shall investigate how this ideology is reflected or countered among Las Vegas Italian Americans.
Italy is known to have an intrinsic divide between the North and the South, each providing their distinct spheres of influence on culture, fashion, culinary traditions and language. This rivalry has built steadily throughout the centuries and has only continued to gain momentum. Luigi Barzini (1964) has established and documented the unique divide between Northern and Southern Italy as well as how it is ingrained in the minds of the population. He has defined the divide between the two distinct areas of the country as the *Problema del Mezzogiorno* (Mezzogiorno means Southern Italy) or the profound difference between the two separate Italies (235). Traditionally the North has been associated with business, industry, education and progress. The South has been construed as agricultural, manual laborers, uneducated and backwards. Barzini claims that: “While the South progresses by feet, the North progresses by miles” (1964:251). The South has been kept in a cycle of poverty and there has been a lack of educational opportunity. Although great strides have been made to remedy the lack of advantage in the South and the extreme polarity between the two Italies is, perhaps, not so extreme in this day and age, there are still cultural beliefs in regard to this divide that retain a firm hold within the minds of the population.

My interviews and ethnography with Las Vegas Italian Americans demonstrate that this ideology, the belief of distinct cultural/physical features among Northern and Southern Italians, has persisted throughout the immigration process and is still present, although not as strongly, among contemporary Italian Americans. There are many examples of this divide. Rachel, one of my research participants explained to me in her quiet elegantly enunciated voice that while most people in the Italian American community are “so nice, nice indeed” she still feels self-conscious and will not
immediately volunteer the information that she is of Sicilian heritage. When I was interviewing Isabella, who immigrated to the United States from Sicily as a child, I asked her what an Italian American looked like. She paused for only a second and then nodded to a large framed picture of Marlon Brando hanging on the wall. “I don’t know how to explain it to you but if you saw that picture, you could tell he was Italian right? I mean that’s what I mean you could tell a person by actions, demeanor, somewhat characteristics you know, although he’s not fully Italian, did you know that?”

Derogatory terms for the much maligned and misrepresented Southern Italians and Italian Americans proliferate. *Gavone, terrone, guido,* however the term for Southern Italy itself *Mezzogiorno,* which means “land of the midday sun” speaks volumes in terms of recognizing how deeply ingrained and marked the divide is throughout Italy. Traditionally Southern Italians were the laboring class and Southern Italy was agricultural while the North was industrial. I have found through my research that there is a recognizably “Italian look” as well as identifiable differences in regard to Northern or Southern Italian heritage. The ideology is still present.

This ideology was carried over from Italy and merged with the racial ideology already in place in the United States. Louise DeSalvo (2003) argues that upon arrival in the United States, Italians were considered Caucasian but were not considered White in their everyday life experiences. They were White only “on paper.” She outlines the difference made during immigration between color (white and Italian) and complexion (dark and Southern Italian). She speculates that this complexion classification was put in place to maintain the boundaries between “desirable” European immigrants and “undesirable” European immigrants, such as Southern Italians. Apparently there were
different graduations of Whiteness that were recognized which further supported the ideological structure already in place, cementing the polarity between the Northern and Southern Italians. DeSalvo asserts that there was not one White race, there were several (2003:27). She further explains that during immigration: “My grandmother, then, became a ‘dark white’ citizen of the United States of America. A ‘white nigger.’ Someone not truly white. Someone Italian American” (2003:28).

Power structures (such as the ideology surrounding Northern and Southern Italian difference) are profoundly embedded within the human body. White skin, dark skin and all of the color graduations between, hair texture, and eye color are just a few examples of how this ideological divide is manifest within the human body. Michel Foucault’s biopower construct demonstrates a world immersed in power dimensions. Foucault’s framework is a map for which to deconstruct the power of the ideology of Northern/Southern difference. How is power aligned? In what capacity does it reflect this persistent ideology? Foucault outlines the regulation and manifestation of power along two axes: bio-politics and anatomo-politics. I intend to explore the dynamic between these two spheres of influence by outlining the distinct structural influence (bio-politics) Las Vegas Italian Americans are subjected to, as well as how this ideology is manifest in the human body (anatomo-politics).

In order to examine the different forms of regulation this chapter shall be divided into two segments. The first shall situate the ideology of the Northern/Southern Italian divide into a historical context. The second component to this chapter will be subdivided and shall address the two different spheres of influence: bio-politics and anatomo-politics. Bio-politics shall be addressed through two different structural regulatory
bodies: the cultural ideology surrounding the Northern and Southern divide as well as the United States Census categories. I utilize interview data to determine the answers to several different research questions: Do Italian Americans recognize a difference between Northern and Southern Italian/Italian American culture? How are these differences manifest in general as well as within the physical realm? How does this ideology relate to Whiteness? and How do Italian Americans relate to the census?

In this chapter I shall also address anatomo-politics (the regulation of physical appearance through cultural beliefs) by referencing interview data. The data suggests that while it has diminished somewhat with each succeeding generation, the ideology regarding the North/South divide is still present. There are still concrete ideas about the differences in culture, class as well as physical appearance and these are reflected throughout the interviews. Analysis of the cultural domain data will also be included (this data consists of word associations: Southern Italian, blonde, fair skin etc). Cultural domain data was collected from various participants associated with the Italian American Club. Not all participants for this part of the study are necessarily Italian American. Collecting data from a variety of community members provides a composite of viewpoints to contrast against those of Italian Americans.

My intention with this chapter is to provide a clear snapshot of the ideology of the separation of Northern and Southern Italian culture and physical appearance, how this ideology is manifest in the everyday lives of Las Vegas Italian Americans and how their identities are regulated by this ideology.
Cultural Domain Analysis

Italian Americans are constrained by the ideologies presented by the overarching ideological framework surrounding the Northern/Southern divide which is in and of itself, a form of bio-politics. However, the ideology surrounding the myth or perception of Southern inferiority is also a constraint laced into the cultural fabric. It is my intention, in this section, to demonstrate how this constraint is manifest in both Italian American and other ethnicities’ conceptions of Whiteness, and in specific, Northern and Southern Italian American Whiteness. This dichotomy, the distinct separation forged and maintained between the two Italies presents polarized aspects of Italian culture, politics and life. While this ideology originated in Italy, it has been carried over with the Italian immigrants and fused with American racial ideology. My objective, with the remainder of this chapter, is to examine the physical stereotypes surrounding Italian Americans as well as Northern and Southern Italians and determining if there is any relevancy with these stereotypes to contemporary Las Vegans.

The anatomo-politics regarding the Northern/Southern divide, such as skin color, hair color and texture and eye color were regulated through distinct forms of bio-politics such as: cultural ideology, politics, government and academia. Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, Italy’s positivist anthropologists’ goal was to provide evidence for the racial differences between the north and south of Italy that these differences were, in fact, not only cultural but were grounded in an actual racial divide. “The North and South have interpreted each other through scientific paradigms and preexisting stereotypes; they have exchanged images and interpretations, fashioning their respective identities by reflecting one another” (Gribaudi 1997:84). The criminal stereotype of
Southern Italians was also furthered by these positivist studies. Cesare Lombroso, in particular, completed a study in 1876 which denounced the South as prone to a criminal tendency, that one would find a much more prevalent criminal element. Also, race was an essential partition between the desirables and the undesirable criminal element. “...Cesare Lombroso identified race as fundamental to the etiology of crime in Southern Italy” (Gibson 1998:99). In addition, Alfredo Niceforo, a Sicilian anthropologist, wrote *L'Italia Barbara contemporanea* (Contemporary Barbarian Italy) in 1898. In this study, he attempts to demonstrate that Sicily and Southern Italy are barbaric in comparison to the rest of the country. They are primitive and he applies positivist sociology to demonstrate that fact. Craniometric data is also used to illustrate that the difference between the North and the South is racial (Dickie 1997:115).

These myths regarding Southern inferiority were filtered through the cultural lens and, in turn, influenced how Italians perceived themselves. The mythology surrounding the South was intertwined with intrigue and romanticism as well as deviancy. “The South is a place of illiteracy, superstition, and magic; of corruption, brigandage, and cannibalism; of pastoral beauty and tranquility admixed with dirt and disease; a cradle of Italian and European civilization that is vaguely, dangerously, alluringly African or Oriental” (Dickie 1999:1). The mythology surrounding the South is itself quite a conundrum and quite contradictory. “The South is much more than a geographical area. It is a metaphor which refers to an imaginary and mythical entity, associated with both hell and paradise; it is a place of the soul and an emblem of the evil that occurs everywhere, but an emblem of that in Italy has been embodied in just one part of the
nation’s territory, becoming one of the myths on which the nation has been built” (Gribaudi 1997:85).

Italian Americans, and Americans as well, have amassed a bevy of stereotypes which built upon the myth of Southern inferiority. Micaela di Leonardo (1984) notes that personal appearance, those that do not possess the “Italian look” are sometimes freed from experiencing discrimination as opposed to others that carry the more stereotypical Southern Italian appearance with all of the stigma associated (1984:166). The Northern/Southern divide has been transitioned from Italian Americans to the larger Anglo culture (1984:165). In this section I contrast word associations regarding Italian Americans and Northern and Southern Italy, collected from both Italians and non-Italians in order to grasp an understanding of the pervasiveness of the Northern and Southern divide in contemporary Las Vegas culture. In particular, I examine instances of anatomo-politics while engaging both the perceptions of Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans. (To view the complete data sets, please reference appendix 1).

There were six participants who identified as some other ethnic background, other than Italian or Italian American. There are several consistencies in regard to the word associations of non-Italian Americans. Almost all participants referenced familiar stereotypes when describing Italian American as a category: good food, music, fun loving, and New York. These word associations shed light on the fact that many of the stereotypes evidenced in the previous section of this chapter are alive in the minds of non-Italian Americans and are utilized as identifiers for Italian Americans. In regard to the Northern and Southern divide of Italy or Italian American culture, they either did not provide an answer or identified with specific regions of Italy (Sicily, Tuscany etc). This
provides evidence that non-Italian Americans do not necessarily adhere to stereotypes associated with Northern and Southern Italians in particular, but rather Italian Americans as a group. In regard to curly, straight, blonde or dark hair participants referenced specific stereotypes prevalent in American culture such as associating blonde hair with being dumb, associating specific physical attributes with celebrities (curly hair- Shirley Temple blue eyes- Frank Sinatra) or just a specific opinion (okay or hope it’s clean). There does not appear to be any direct correlation between specific Italian American attributes that are distributed and divided between the Northern and Southern Italian populace. In regard to skin color (tan or pale) and complexion (dark or light) participants either avoiding the sun or laying in the sun, referencing specific American racial categories (White), well known people in America (George Bush, Tony Bennett), areas of the country (Northern or Southern), opinions (okay or attractive) or ethnic groups (Scandinavian, African American). In this group of participants there does not appear to be evidence of an association of pale or fair complexion with Northern Italy or dark or tan complexion with Southern Italy. Lastly, in regard to Italian (as in European not Italian American) participants again referenced familiar stereotypes (good cook, good looking, compassionate, hairy) or specific regions or cities of Italy (Rome). This provides evidence that stereotypes specific to the larger ethnic group of Italians or Italian Americans penetrate American culture more broadly then specific stereotypes in regard to Northern and Southern Italians, or specific regions of Italy.

There are several similarities in the responses between the two participants of mixed Italian ancestry. The first participant identified himself with the term Italian American, while the second identified it with pasta. There were no similarities in regard to the
Northern/Southern Italian association but it is important to note that the first participant did recognize a difference and preferred the South. In regard to curly hair, tan skin and straight and dark hair both participants referenced American racial categories (White, African American, Mexicano) or preference (pretty, looks okay, sexy, friendly). In regard to blonde and blue eyes, both referenced familiar American stereotypes (dumb, ditzy, sexy) or celebrity (Frank Sinatra). Dark and fair complexion were identified with preference (needs more sun) or category (vampire, foreigner) and for Italian (as in European not Italian American) both participants referenced familiar stereotypes (sweaty and clothes are way too tight). Again, primarily stereotypes associated with Italians or Italian Americans as a group were referenced rather than specific stereotypes of the North and South. American racial categories and other identifiers were infused throughout both participants’ responses. There was only one reference to a Northern/Southern divide, which the first participant preferred the South.

Four participants identified as Italian American. The word associations of Italian Americans illustrate that there is a recognized difference between Northern and Southern Italy. Northern Italy was identified as snobs and Milan, Southern Italy was identified as Sicily and common. Curly and straight hair did not hold any specific Italian reference, neither did tan or pale skin. Northern Italy was referenced for the blonde hair category by one participant, dark hair and complexion were associated with Southern Italy and a fair complexion was associated with Northern Italy by one participant. In regard to the Italian category, participants referred to familiar stereotypes (loves food, family oriented etc). or personal opinions (not comfortable with, reminds me of our family). Word associations with Italian Americans demonstrate that there is a recognized difference in
regard to the North and South, yet they also adhere to familiar American stereotypes of Italians as a larger cultural group.

Two participants identified as Italian (born and raised in Italy). The two Italian participants’ answers do not compare. The first participant has arranged his answers in Italian categories. He has translated the English words into Italian. The second participant’s answers, however, elucidates the fact that there are recognized physical categories in Italy such as: curly hair, tan skin and dark complexion. Specific regions are also noted (dark complexion) and the fact that blonde hair, pale skin and blue eyes are not noted Italian features. Also, the second Italian participant noted familiar stereotypes when describing Italian (very family oriented and stylish).

Two participants categorized themselves as both American and Italian, as they possess dual citizenship. These two participants demonstrate that, similar to their citizenship they represent both Italian and American associations to the specific categories. They recognize that a lot of Italians have a dark complexion, yet do not form any Italian associations with blonde, blue eyes, dark hair or fair complexion. They also are proud of Italians, listing several positive characteristics such as possessing their own culture, and they also list Southern Italy as the best in the world. The other physical categories do not represent specific ties to Italian frames of reference, but rather specific personal opinions (attractive, it’s good, excellent etc).

Overall, the cultural domain data provides a glimpse into how participants associate and arrange ideas surrounding Italian Americans. The data demonstrates that there is a recognized difference between Northern and Southern Italian culture amongst the Italian American participants. The participants of mixed ethnicity or of non-Italian
ethnicity were more apt to demonstrate an association with American ideas pertaining to “race” or American cultural constructs. There was not a recognized divide between Northern and Southern Italian culture among these participants. The next section details data collected from, exclusively, Italian American participants. This data is qualitative and was collected during in depth interviews.

A Definitive Divide

D: Do you think that there is a difference between Northern and Southern Italian in your opinion?

F: Big difference huge.

D: Okay and is it still maintained today, this difference?

F: Um no, I’ll tell you it used to be, because at that time when I was there, I was born during the Depression and then I was all under Mussolini and the country was very poor at that time and some people didn’t travel anything and then but then since the Northern part is the industrial, is the heart of Italy and the Southern part is more agricultural and so a lot of people immigrated, you know moved to the north to go and work in the factories.

In the above excerpt Fabrizia details her perception and experience growing up as an Italian citizen. Historically, there was a definite divide between Northern and Southern Italy. Fabrizia explains that there was an occupational difference as well, with Northern Italy being more industrial and Southern Italy being more agricultural. This divide was often manifest in the physical realm and provides a direct example of socio-race. Class, cultural attributes and physical attributes all were markers for this divide. As evidenced by interviews with Las Vegas Italian Americans, this divide is still present today. The
divide between Northern and Southern Italy/Italian Americans demonstrates that the census categories are ineffective in representing the diversity that is encompassed within the White ethnic designation. When asked about a Northern/Southern divide in Italy or amongst Italian Americans, all interview participants (of Italian heritage) provided supportive commentary, in some way, for this divide. Some, such as Lenny, a middle aged Italian American man, answer without hesitation:

D: *Now kind of again we’ve already touched on this is there a difference between Northern and Southern Italians or Italian Americans?*

L: *Absolutely.*

Other Italian Americans, such as Constantino, recognize that there is a difference, in regard to age set or generation as well as location, as to how this Northern/Southern divide is recognized:

D: *Is there a difference between Northern and Southern Italian culture in your opinion?*

C: *People in Italy, yes.*

D: *And what about in the United States? You know, Southern culture?*

C: *I would say the answer would be the same like back to the last question, depending on your age, I would say probably not.*

Salvatore explained, in detail, his estimation of the Northern and Southern divide, including the distinctive physical characteristics representative of this divide:

D: *Yeah, that’s really fascinating. So, is there a difference, in your opinion, between Northern and Southern Italians?*

S: *There is a little bit, Northern Italians are more influenced by Northern Europe and Germany and Austria and France to a certain degree. Southern Italians are more*
Mediterranean and the cultures are very similar to each other but the Southern Italians have more distinct characteristic of culture than, their own, say than Northern Italians do. Matter of fact Northern Italians look a lot different than Southern Italians.

D: Like what?

S: Northern Italians have more fair skin and blue eyes and also lighter hair. Blondish, reddish hair. All the elements of the German and Austrian influence. And then Southern Italians, which are more Mediterranean or which would be Greek, African other I guess Sardian or whatever other cultures are in the Mediterranean area there because of that. And that’s only because of the way that, the country was invaded so many times over the centuries that there is the self identity has taken awhile to develop, but the history of the country is rich with that, with different countries over periods of time that came in to invade, especially Sicily. Sicily has been invaded hundreds of times there is so many different cultures that came in there, different countries and settled people actually stayed there so that makes up the Sicilian culture more so.

Interviews with Las Vegas Italian Americans illustrate that there is a divide between Northern and Southern Italian and/or Italian American culture. While many agree that this divide is not as evident now as it has been in the past, it is still recognized among certain age brackets and populations of Italian Americans today.

Social Class

As detailed in the introduction, socio-race is a concept that ties together physical attributes and social class. I have found, throughout my research, that the Northern and Southern Italian divide is a direct example of socio-race. Many interview participants recognize that not only is there a bias against Southern Italians, but that this bias is
directly related to physical appearance. Southern Italians, or those of Southern Italian heritage, were often viewed as inferior and of a lower class. They could not escape being labeled as such, because the labels were directly dependent on the division of the population by physical attributes.

Nico, Gabriella and Carla correlated social class with physical characteristics:

D: So in your opinion is there any difference between Northern and Southern Italians or Italian Americans?

N: You mean is there a difference? Yeah there’s a difference.

D: There’s a difference?

N: Oh yeah if you were from Southern Italy you were low class, well it’s true.

C: It’s true.

N: And if you were from Northern Italy that’s where you had your blondes and blue eyes believe it or not, lighter skin, and they were considered more more you know, rich, better, whatever.

D: And do you think that sentiment is still reflected in the Italian American community?

N: Yes in Italy sure.

D: In Italy as well as the Italian American community?

N: Well let’s say everybody that is my what am I? First generation, born here, alright well amongst the first generation born here, they would still look at you and they would go if you say, when they ask what are you- and you go well I’m half Sicilian and they’d look at you and go “oh god hang on to your wallets.” Right?

C: That’s true.
N: And if you’re Napoleatian they were notorious thieves, from Naples you know so I mean but the second generation they wouldn’t, don’t have a clue about that.

Often answers reflected the co-mingling of social class with differentiation within the physical realm. Filipo explained that the South is more often associated with manual labor or lower classed positions:

D: In your opinion is there a difference between Northern and Southern Italians or people of Northern and Southern Italian ancestry?

F: I think so.

D: Can you tell if someone is Northern Italian or of Northern Italian ancestry?

F: I think so because, I think so. I think the Southern Italian is more of a laborer and I think as you go up North it’s more scholastic, I think.

Tom and Rachel mention the difference in dialect and Rachel also details her experience of feeling uncomfortable volunteering information regarding her Sicilian background to Northern contemporaries:

D: Okay. So in your opinion is there a difference between Northern and Southern Italians or Italian American culture?

T: They talk different I know that my I remember my father when he’d meet somebody from Northern Italy, he’d change his dialect and tone of speaking and I wouldn’t understand it because we were Southern.

R: I know a couple of people from Northern Italy and they certainly have kind of a… there’s almost a caste system yeah and I don’t volunteer that I’m Sicilian when I talk to those people.
Christian, an elderly Italian American man, points to culinary differences as well as education and social class:

D: Okay wow, so what are some other differences maybe besides cooking between the Northern and Southern Italian culture?

C: Well I think that the Northern people are more educated than the Southerns.

D: Okay, now who thinks that? Usually is it all Italians are that like?

C: Especially the real Northern Italians, they come near the Swiss border

D: So you mentioned that there’s this belief of Italians that the Northerns are educated and so if they’re more, so is that just in Italy or do you think that Italian Americans believe that too?

C: Oh I think Italian Americans believe that.

D: Okay.

C: They think of Sicilians as Mafioso.

D: So there’s a large difference in class, in like social class?

C: Yes.

D: Okay.

C: Although we respect them, if they do something you know we don’t think that of everybody but sometimes you do.

Isabella explains that Southern Italians possess not only darker physical traits but also a more intense family dynamic and culture:

D: Okay and what about Southern Italians?

I: They’re a little stockier, a little shorter, um dark hair, brown eyes um they would dress a little bit differently than Northern Italy at some point in time, I’m talking an older
population that perhaps now is more homogenized with the Northern you know with the education the way it happened but um you know you can see the black shawls and the more grieving for during the funerals and things like that so more intense, more culture that I’m not despairing the Northern about family you know, it’s like thicker (laughs).

D: And so where in Italy are you from?

I: (city in Sicily)

Initial conversations regarding the Northern/Southern divide amongst Italian Americans illustrate that there is still a divide recognized amongst middle aged, first or second generation Italian Americans. There is also a correlation between social class and physical characteristics. The Northern/Southern divide is manifest within the physical realm.

Skin Deep

All Italian Americans interviewed referenced, in some way, the different physical characteristics of Northern/Southern Italians or Northern/Southern Italian heritage. Some, in particular, continued to further differentiate into regions and subdivide Italy and Sicily. Lenny maintains that there is no physical difference amongst Italians, but those from Sicily, or of Sicilian heritage appear considerably distinct:

L: Sometimes, sometimes. You can tell more with the Sicilian side. My cousins are Sicilian, they have darker skin and a lot curlier hair. They almost look African American. Yeah, I mean, they’re Sicilian.

S: Our daughter’s godfather is Sicilian and he has very very dark skin. Dark skin and kinky kinky curly hair.
D: So again, this is kind of similar, are you able to tell if someone is Northern or Southern Italian by their physical appearance?

L: No.

D: So even if it’s someone with the more Sicilian appearance, you wouldn’t pick that out right away?

L: You’d be able to pick that out a lot more because of the skin color.

Salvatore explained the various physical differences according to region:

D: Okay so are you able to tell now when you recognize people as Italian Americans any difference say between from the North or from the South? By their physical appearance?

S: Sometimes, sometimes I can. That’s a little harder.

D: So what are some physical characteristics of Italian Americans, like aside from the dressing and everything else the

S: Well for the most part they are usually um dark haired, almost black hair, brown eyes dark brown eyes, um they have a strong facial feature usually they have, and it depends it depends usually on where they’re from but usually their nose is a little bit protruding more so and that’s more so in males than it is females. Like my nose is more beak like for example than like uh somebody else might have a pug nose but that could be because they’re from a different part of Italy, uh the Calabrians are more their facial features are big everything is big about them their fatter faces, bigger heads they’re just they look, they’re naturally big people Neapolitans are usually pretty small, predominantly slender build I mean for the most part, I can’t say that they’re all like that. Women, some women have lighter brown hair, some have reddish brown hair, predominantly brown eyes, olive
Northern Italians are usually fairer skinned, some Sicilians are too, which is surprising. I know a couple Sicilian people with very fair skin and blue eyes.

Constantino focuses on white skin as exemplarily of Northern Italians. He also discusses other non-physical characteristics representative of this divide. Towards the end of the interview excerpt he noted that there is a stereotypical Italian look. The stereotypical look that he describes is similar to the Southern Italian look that other interview participants describe:

D: So how can you tell if someone is Northern Italian, or of Northern Italian heritage?
C: You mean physically?
D: In general.
C: Well physically you know the more North you’d go the whiter skin they’d be typically, um I don’t know, I don’t think physically you can tell the difference and again this is the same type of answer to those other questions there’s um, you know depending on which generation you’re in I think that all Italians whether they’re Northern Italians or Southern Italians or Sicilians I think they have that same general pride and honor and you know love of family that the Northern and Southern, I think that all Italians share that so I couldn’t call a differentiation between that.
D: So as far as like, again another question that’s similar, how can you tell if someone is Southern Italian, like a lot of the values that you mentioned before, family and honor can you tell if someone is Italian American by looking at them?
C: With some people you certainly can. I can’t tell you how many times people have told me, you look very matter of fact, you’re Italian so I know I’ve said this to this total stranger asked him, “you’re Italian right?” or you know. But there certainly are people
that don’t look stereotypical Italian you know. My father didn’t look Italian necessarily, he opened his mouth you knew he was (laughs)

D: So what is this like stereotypical look you mentioned earlier?

C: You know, I’ll throw a little humor, but certainly it would be uh you know dark hair, dark eyes, olive skin, and a big nose.

D: Okay.

C: Maybe short structure too.

Nico and Carla concur that one can still recognize an Italian American’s Northern or Southern heritage based on physical features:

D: So are you able to tell if someone is Northern or Southern Italian or of Northern or Southern Italian heritage by their physical appearance.

N: Yeah, like I said, usually if you’re from the North you’re a little bit taller, and you’re lighter skinned, blonde, not uncommon like I said to be blonde hair and blue-eyed just like in Spain they’re blonde haired blue eyed.

C: Blonde hair blue eyed.

D: So you can tell, even with Italian Americans, you can still tell?

N: Yeah. Well look (name of female friend) from Northern Italy and look at how light skinned she is and blonde hair, you know.

C: And (name of male friend)

N: And (name of male friend)’s fair.

Christian describes Southern Italians or those of Southern Italian heritage as darker:

D: Okay. So the next question is, can you see if somebody is Northern or Southern by looking at them?
C: Not really, maybe the Southerns are more darker, more darker looking.

D: Darker and is that just skin tone or

C: Yes skin tone.

D: And what about like hair or eye color is there any difference there?

C: Yeah, really black hair. I used to have black hair.

Rachel and Tom mentioned a specific “Italian look.” When asked to describe this look they associated it with Southern Italian physical characteristics:

D: So when you say “look Italian” what do you mean? What is the picture that comes to mind?

T: When you’re what?

D: When you say like “look Italian.”

T: Look Italian?

R: I think probably many again, Southern Italians they’re usually about 5’10” they usually have a pretty good head of hair (laughs) stocky build, what else as far as looks?

As far as looking at them?

T: (Name of Club member) has a full head of hair and he’s 80 something years old

R: Yeah but that’s it, hair, stocky build about between 5’10”, 5’8”-5’10” But look at (name of male friend) he’s Northern, he’s 6’1” or something like that.

T: Yeah, you don’t find too many giants walking around. (laughs)

R: (laughs)

T: No potential ball players.

R: That’s right.
D: So are you able to tell if someone is Northern or Southern Italian or Northern or Southern Italian heritage by their physical appearance? Like you know you guys were mentioning that they look

R: I think so.

D: Okay.

R: But maybe that’s a stereotype, I don’t know. But I think so, don’t you? (Name of male friend) doesn’t, we know he’s Italian but I wouldn’t think immediately

T: My brother doesn’t look Italian.

R: No, actually babe, I think your brother looks more Italian than you do. I think you look more like your mom and he looks more like your dad. And Tom’s mom was German.

D: So there is a definite look to these different

R: I think there is, yeah.

T: I think so.

Adriana, a middle aged Italian American, woman agrees that there are still distinct physical differences amongst Italian Americans and that these differences are also manifest in the physical realm:

D: Okay so can you tell if someone is Northern Italian or of Northern Italian heritage?

A: Northern Italians are fairly light where the Southern Italians are darker so on my father’s side of the family I could see where the blondes are coming, there’s more light haired kids where on the Sicilian side of my family, we’re all very very dark. But other than that no.
The preceding section explored the various physical constructions of Italian or Italian American heritage. All participants interviewed noted, in some way, a divide between Northern/Southern Italian or Italian Americans and their culture. Often, these differences were described through physical characteristics. Skin color and various degrees of Whiteness represented by other physical features were often mentioned. The data follows the trend of the traditional ideology surrounding the Northern/Southern Italian divide. It is important to take notice, however, that the recognition of this divide is, according to research participants, limited in scope to both generation as well as, in some cases, nationality.

It’s a Generational Thing

While all Italian Americans interviewed maintain that there is a difference between Northern and Southern Italian/Italian Americans, they also recognized that this difference is becoming increasingly less evident. Each succeeding generation of Italian Americans is less likely to recognize any regional identification or the Northern/Southern divide. Constantino explained that the divide, as well as negative perceptions of Southern Italians and Sicilians is primarily recognized in the middle aged and older generations:

D: But it’s not so much prevalent today as it has been in the past?
C: No like I said people my age and older, they will still make derogatory remarks if they’re not Sicilian you know but people younger than me nah I don’t think they understand the difference they don’t see, they don’t have that ah prejudice and bias about Sicilians being lower class or peasants or thieves.
Rachel and Tom explain that amongst Italian Americans of the second and third
generation, these differences are no longer noted:

D: *So you don’t think that Northern Italians think that it’s more beneficial maybe to be fairer*

T: *Fairer complexioned?*

D: *Yeah.*

R: *Me neither I really don’t know that.*

T: *No.*

D: *Or of Northern Italian heritage? As Italian Americans of 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} generation?*

T: *We don’t see much of that.*

Adriana explains that because there are high rates of intermarriage between other
ethnicities and Italian Americans, it is much more difficult to discern heritage by physical
characteristics:

D: *And can you tell if someone is Italian American just by looking at them?*

A: *Sometimes you can, I believe. But now the races are so integrated I think you know even with my children. You know my children are you know they’re part (other European ethnicity) so you know it’s hard to tell.*

Isabella maintains that it is difficult to discern the difference between Northern and
Southern Italians/Italian Americans, but someone from Italy would be able to recognize
this difference:

D: *Okay so can you tell if someone is Italian American by looking at them? In your opinion?*

I: *Sometimes (laugh) not all the time, but sometimes just the posture, the looks you know.*
D: Okay, in your opinion are you able to tell if someone is Northern or Southern Italian by their physical appearance? Or of Northern or Southern Italian heritage?

I: I could, but I don’t know that somebody that maybe doesn’t come from, is not Italian that comes from Italy, I don’t know.

Christian maintains that “real Italian people” are able to make out this difference more easily than Italian Americans or non Italians:

D: What about like Italian Americans? Can you tell if their heritage is Northern or Southern when you first meet them?

C: I can’t, at least I can't, but the real Italian people can tell.

D: Okay.

C: Like the ones who were raised with their grandmother and grandfather. I wasn’t I didn’t even know my grandmothers or my grandfathers.

D: Okay.

C: But when I went to Italy I met all of my cousins, when I went to Italy.

D: Okay so in your opinion can you tell if somebody is Italian American just by looking at them?

C: Oh yeah, oh yes.

Interviews with Las Vegas Italian Americans indicate that the ideology surrounding the Northern/Southern divide in Italian culture is still evident. However, this ideology is failing to maintain a grasp on second, third and fourth generation Italian Americans. Most Italian Americans interviewed did not recognize that there is an advantage to having white or fair skin in the Italian American community. This provides evidence also, that the ideology surrounding the Northern/Southern divide is diminishing.
with time. It is interesting to note, however, that physical stereotypes of both Northern and Southern Italians prevail. Often Southern Italian physical traits are utilized when explaining a general Italian American look or features. This provides evidence that the divide is present, on some level yet the advantages once granted by possessing Northern Italian physical traits is no longer recognized as frequently.

Whiteness Manifest in the Physical Realm

Whiteness interpreted through physical characteristics has been noted within the Italian American community in which I conducted research. When asked if there is any particular meaning associated with white skin within the Italian American community, I received varying answers. Some Italian Americans pointed out that it may be advantageous to possess a fairer complexion while others noted that this difference was best represented in Italy or amongst earlier Italian American generations. Lenny details that, while Sicilians and Southern Italians were discriminated against, he does not feel that possessing white skin in the Italian American community has any specific meaning or value:

D: Do you think that, I know that we discussed differences within the Italian American community between the regions, do you think that there’s any particular meaning associated with white skin within the Italian American community specifically?
L: I don’t think so. I personally have not heard or seen anything like that
D: Oh okay. So there’s no kind of what you said that people of Sicilian heritage were looked down on?
L: Yeah I mean, like I said if you’re from Southern Italy or Sicily or whatever absolutely those were the workers.
D: Okay so it wouldn’t necessarily be advantageous to have fair skin or

L: In Italy it might be.

D: But within the Italian American community?

L: Out here? No.

Nico feels that Whiteness, or a fair complexion, is advantageous and is directly associated with social class. However, he also recognizes that this advantage is generationally dependent:

D: So what is the meaning of white skin or lighter skin tones within the Italian American community?

N: No there’s none.

D: There’s none?

N: Only well again if you’re from Northern Italy, you feel that you’re better.

G: Sure and if you’re in Italy.

C: That’s what she’s talking about.

N: Yeah they have classes, different classes.

G: Do they still feel that way today?

N: They…yeah.

C: Yeah.

D: Even within the Italian American community, do you think that that difference is still noted?

N: It depends on

G: How old you are, what generation.
N: Yeah. And if you’re first born here in America, there’s still that mindset but after that forget about it.

G: Yeah.

Several Italian Americans, such as Fabrizia, did not correlate white skin with an advantage but rather related white skin to geographic conditions as well as intermarriage in Italy:

D: So you don’t think that um white skin it means anything in the Italian American community? In specific like are there differences in the way people look, that are considered Italian that might have darker skin lighter skin whatnot, all those differences does white skin mean anything, to be lighter or to be fairer complexioned?

F: No because see like for instance once like I explained to you the Northern part had lighter skin, white because it rains a lot there is less sun as you go down there is more sun and your pigmentation just the sun follows it right see? So you go down, all the way down right and like in Sicily they have darker skin and also because of the genetics. Because of all this people coming through there well for instance lot of people with red hair in Sicily, why because of the French and the German were there so they carry the genes right So it’s oh and I don’t think Italy is, we saw everything everybody we are very open-minded.

Furthermore, Isabella, from Sicily, related white skin to geographic conditions:

D: Okay. So in general what is associated then with the whiter or fairer skin in Northern Italy? Is it just not as a novelty or wasn’t?
I: Well it’s actually, I mean it’s a fact of life that’s how you know the Northern Italy area it’s more, it’s closer to you know the Swiss, the Alps, Germany, England where you find the more, you know fairer, white skin.

Christian also explored the concept of geographic conditions as well as demonstrating that, in his opinion, there is not an advantage to fair skin within the Italian American community:

D: Okay so you know like how we talked about there’s differences between the people from Southern heritage and Northern heritage how they are darker or lighter so you don’t think it has

C: No no, got something to do with the sun, because Southern Italy is a lot sunnier.

D: Yeah.

C: It’s a lot sunnier, Southern Italians are dark they’re got more blend, more dark more

D: So you don’t think there’s any, it’s not beneficial if, or people want to be lighter skinned to be associated with the North maybe?

C: No, I like myself when I had my tan, no. I haven’t played golf in four months and I lost everything, okay. I love when I play because I get dark. You know, I think I got more color then.

While Christian acknowledges that fair skin does not hold any advantage within the Italian American community, he does provide commentary that demonstrates his belief that Northern Italians would prefer to possess a fairer complexion:

D: What in general is associated in general with white skin in Southern Italy do you think? What in your opinion is associated with white or light skin in Southern Italy? Any kind of ideology or ideas about having fairer skin in the South?
C: It couldn’t tell you because I really don’t know. I’ve never been that far South in Italy. But I’ve been North.

D: Okay so what do you think about that in the North?

C: I think they would, I think they would.

D: Would prefer to have lighter skin?

C: Yes.

D: Okay and why is that? Do you think they associate it with anything?

C: Like them being a lot smarter?

D: Yeah.

C: Right.

Salvatore believes that within the Italian American community, it is not necessarily advantageous to possess a fairer complexion, but rather they would prefer to distance themselves from being labeled White:

D: So what do you think is the meaning of white skin or a fair complexion in the Italian American community?

S: Um I mean I consider them the same way, they’re still White even though their mentality or their you know their arrogance or whatever their bravado would say otherwise. What’s different then? If you’re uh German, French, English, or Irish or Scottish I mean it’s all predominantly Caucasian I mean even in Central America there’s light skinned, Spanish speaking, they even have blue eyes. So I mean would they be considered Caucasians too, but because they speak a different language they’re regulated to being who they are but if they spoke perfect English would they be
considered Caucasian? I would have to say yes, because they’re Americanized. Even though they’re fair skinned Mexicans or South American the same difference I think.

Salvatore’s explanation of Italian Americans’ need to differentiate themselves from the White masses provides support that census categories, such as White, are ineffective in representing how ethnic identity actually plays out in practice, in everyday life.

Categorization Revisited

Census categories were created, according to Benedict Anderson (1991), in order to encourage a cohesive national identity. These categories, and the boundaries between, are both inclusive as well as exclusive. The category of White has greatly transitioned throughout the years and those that were once considered to be “exotic, “foreign” or “Other” are now included into this mainstream Anglo-American category. There are various power dimensions evident through this structural means of regulation. As a bureaucratic or administrative entity it presents a form of structural constraint.

The census categories continue to reinforce the division of the population by physical attributes. However, the category of White or Caucasian does not imply a diversity of physical attributes but rather one determining factor: white skin. The Northern and Southern divide in Italian culture contests the logic of these categories. The fact that there is such diversity, not only in the physical realm, within a body of the population deemed White, demonstrates that the blanketing category of White is indeed masking this diversity and encouraging conformity. How do Italian Americans relate to this structural form of regulation? Some promote the view that it provides a necessary function in society, while others recognize that it is a divisive factor that encourages
inequality. The various ways in which Italian Americans relate to the census categories are detailed throughout this section.

Some Italian Americans asserted that there is a need for the census categories. Census categories provide an important social function, however inaccurate they are at gauging actual personal ethnic identity. Fabrizia provides a pragmatic viewpoint on the census categories. In her opinion they are a formality and provide a necessary function, even though they are not flexible in regard to ethnic options:

*F:* Well I put Caucasian of course

*D:* Okay so you definitely and is there... would you just choose Caucasian without hesitation or anything?

*F:* Yes I do.

*D:* Okay, okay.

*D:* So what do you think about those large ethnic categories that they give you on those forms? What's your opinion of them?

*F:* Well, they I guess they need it for statistics, you need to know who's who, what's what, what the composition of the neighborhood, the town the city, the state. And because you can tell statistically what you need for everything, for financial like school and then you have a language problem here, big language problem and so that's why you have so many so many problems because uh so finally they say that like for instance they have to have commercials in Spanish they have to have you know at least the minimum for the medical for you know and officially here in Las Vegas and then finally they instituted a, I met the lady who um, they instituted the a group of interpreters for the courts and I met
the lady that was running it and um you know cause we have like 150 nations in Las Vegas, did you know that?

D: I didn’t know there was that many in Las Vegas.

F: Yeah, a huge amount of people coming from all over and so you have to you know, something happens to the person you have to have somebody that can help them

D: So you think those ethnic categories they provide a function in society?

F: Uh what?

D: Those ethnic categories, like White or

F: Oh yes yeah.

D: Provide a function?

F: Yes it is a very important function that uh, yes, and yes.

D: And do you think that they are accurate in how people actually identify? Or are they like to broad or what?

F: Uh I think that I would say that people in general are honest I mean they wouldn’t make I mean now if you’re black you just put you know, I mean nobody’s gonna know because they got in a big pile they just wanna know if there are 50, 100 and so.

D: So I mean in terms of though actually providing an example of what people would actually identify as, do you think that it is enough, like giving those five categories, like you said there was however many nations over a 100 nations represented here

F: Right.

D: Does that give them five options to choose from, is that

F: Well no, they do, no, I know they give also like for instance um mixed what do you call it, how do you call it? It’s like bilingual okay, they say biracial, okay or look at Tiger I
mean he is four racial right so don’t know what he does, but at least he can put bi. And so no I think that yeah it’s important.

Christian’s promotes a similar opinion regarding ethnic categories:

C: You gotta be something, you gotta mark something

D: Yeah so everybody has to. Do you think they’re accurate though in gauging how people actually identify?

C: I don’t know I think I read something about that once about a Black person, with a White mother she marked both I think.

D: So you think that, so you feel comfortable identifying in those larger categories instead of breaking it down? To like Italian or German or Polish or whatnot?

C: I don’t think it should be like that.

D: You don’t think it should be further differentiated?

C: Well you could put a million things down, a million counties, you know where are you gonna get all the paper?

D: Okay.

C: Right? You know white, black, green, yellow, that’s it.

Salvatore explains that the categories the census promotes are prejudicial yet at the same time convenient for gathering statistics on a given population:

S: I don’t think it should matter. If it’s for statistical purposes then I understand it, but I really think that when somebody goes and applies for a job or applies for some type of government assistance you have to put that stigma down I don’t really think it should matter. All that should matter is your name, your age and social security number, if you have one. And you know the basics so you can get certain things I don’t really think that
that should be a big deal. It kind of makes me mad in a way too. I think it kind of categorizes people in a prejudicial way.

D: So you don’t think that they’re accurate in, that they reflect everyday identity of people? Like cause they’re pretty broad categories, like you said White, but then there’s so many different things that go in the White category.

S: Yes I mean that’s not accurate at all.

D: Okay.

S: I mean but if they had to put everything on a form like that the data collectors would be all day going through all that stuff.

D: Okay.

S: Then so they have to break it down into generalities.

D: Okay so it’s just more of a convenience factor than

S: Yeah I think so.

D: Okay.

S: Otherwise they’d be all day, it’d be, there’d be a hundred boxes.

Adriana also provides a more practical view of the census categories. She maintains that they function to actually protect citizens from ethnic or racial discrimination:

A: I well since they only have Caucasian, I check Caucasian. It’s, they never have Italian. So it’s the closest thing I am is Caucasian and that’s why I said, what I said earlier.

D: Okay and so would you prefer that they had like an Italian American box or a little more specific choices for people?
A: Well um no as a matter of fact I don’t. I think that they should leave it as general as possible because I think what happens, like what I mentioned with an interview or application, um you know, what would happen if my husband if I’m Italian and my husband is Greek and somebody marked the Greek box and because I had a horrible marriage with a Greek I may not interview this person because he’s Greek so I think that in that example on an application, employment, credit card, anything that has to do with that it should be left as, I mean why would we even have to list it? My feeling is there’s no need to list it. You should only have to list that if, for a situation of identification, maybe social security, you know things of that nature, hospitals where you’re going in for a surgery or whatever but for an application I think that it’s unnecessary.

Although Benedict Anderson (1991) asserts that the function of the census was to promote a sense of nationalism (163) the census categories seem to promote a national identity as secondary. Several Italian American research participants maintain that there should be a cohesive American identity first, before any other ethnic identity. Isabella explains that the census categories should be secondary to a national identity as Americans:

D: Okay so on the census or on other applications what ethnic box do you check?
I: Caucasian.

D: And why do you choose that one?
I: It depends if it’s there or not actually. Sometimes you know say White non-Hispanic something like that, sometimes they will say Caucasian but that’s the best representation.

D: And what do you think about these large ethnic categories such as White, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander those kind?
I: You know what? I think they should all lose them, in my opinion.

D: Okay.

I: They should all be Americans first and then whatever culture they came from. That’s the first thing Americans should do, is think of themselves as Americans and we would have less of an issue in identifying ourselves with subcultures of some kind. Yes we are, we come from all over the place, but you know what, we’re first Americans, if we are Americans and then we’re a sub culture.

In the following excerpt Gabriella notes a direct relationship between physical characteristics and the census categories, and that these categories promote racial stereotypes. Nico provides a rather humorous anecdote to support his belief that census categories should not be utilized, but rather one’s identity should be determined according to nationality:

D: Okay so what do you think about those large ethnic categories like White, African American, those like five choices or whatever they give, what do you think about them?

N: In my father’s day it was a big deal, today I myself personally get upset when someone says “what are you?” Uh the correct answer is I’m an American that’s the correct answer, I am an American citizen. Not I am an Italian American or I’m a Black American or I’m a Polish American you know.

C: Yeah I have a hard time with that.

N: You know what I mean? You can join an Italian American Club which is fine but somebody says my allegiance is to America.

C: I still think it should be American Italian.
N: Well whatever, to me when someone says I’m Italian- you’re an idiot- you’re an American you’re not, you weren’t you know what I mean you’re a citizen of the United States of America. But in my father’s day very very big.

C: It was important.

N: Very important.

G: When I think about things though, the first thing that comes to my mind is stereotypically what they look like you think you know, when you hear Asian you automatically think slanted eyes you know.

C: Yellow.

G: Yeah yellow skin.

D: Do you think those categories just play into the stereotype?

N: Yeah they do right, you’re absolutely correct.

C: Hmmm- we shouldn’t even have them, if you’re a citizen.

G: So shouldn’t even matter what you are.

C: Yeah.

N: I know of a guy, I don’t think I told you this before, we were going to Europe Carla and I, and I drove this poor bastard nuts and I was happy to do it too. We wanted to go, we were thinking about going into Paris and we were going to London? And I said I think we could fly across, you know go to Paris, we have enough time to do this but we can’t go into Paris, you had to have a visa.

C: Uh huh.

N: Stamped on your passport and we went to the Paris Embassy in (name of city) on (name of street), and this was the time where there was a lot of highjackings okay.
C: Okay just highjackings not

N: And black hair, black moustache you know, they right away right? (laughs) You know so I understand the guy he says “what are you?” And I kept saying “American” I know what he wanted you know and he goes, “no, no no, what are you?” and I go “I’m an American citizen, what do you think I am?” That’s what I am. And finally, he kept asking me and asking me and then he when he was about to turn blue I go “are you trying to ask me where my family is from?” And he goes “Yes!” And I go “well my family is from Italy I’m Italian.” And he says “That’s what I want.” And I say “But I’m not an Italian citizen, I’m an American, you moron.” And he just couldn’t grasp, you know all he saw was the black moustache and black hair and he thought I was going to blow up the plane, that’s what he thought you know. But people are stupid.

C: But it matters.

N: It matters. It mattered.

Discussions pertaining to the census categories demonstrate that, while there is still definite power in the defining aspect, most Italian Americans recognize the inaccuracy of these categories. These categories are not just considered a given, Italian Americans demonstrate agency in how they chose to identify outside of these categories. “Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix….” (Foucault 1978:94). According to Foucault there is room for agency within power dimensions. As racial definition lies at the heart of the census categories, and these categories are continuously reinforced by various societal structures, they maintain their position of power over the populace. Categorization remains a national obsession,
and conversing about the current racial categories makes them continue to remain a source of power. “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1978:101). However, as demonstrated by the following excerpts, the discourse surrounding the census categories also reflects an opposition to their power.  

Filipo is a firm supporter of specific ethnic identification. He views the overly simplified categories provided by the census forms as completely inaccurate at gauging actual identity:

_D:_ Or just what do you think it means to be white or Caucasian when someone says “Oh, I’m White or Caucasian, what does it mean?”

_F:_ You know I think it’s something the government used as a simple way of differentiating. Because if you ask a Mexican if he’s white what does he say? Is he a White man?

_D:_ I really don’t know, that’s the difficulty with these categories

_F:_ Is a White man, is a Chinese man a white man? Probably not right?

_D:_ Probably not.

_F:_ If he’s White man, if he comes from here, American Indian he’s ethnic

_D:_ Could be.

_T:_ White man. Yeah this whole White Black thing it’s too…it’s too tunnel vision. You have White or Black but it’s all about ethnic.

Filipo further asserts that there should be a blank box on census forms for people to self identify. On the 2010 Census there was a blank box for many of the ethnic categories, yet the White or Caucasian category lacked this option for further differentiation.
Lenny and Susan express their frustration with the current census categories. Lenny asks the ultimate question that challenges the all encompassing White category: “What IS White?” Their interview excerpt provides further support that the census categories promote anatomo-politics as they are directly associated with physical features and skin color. In addition, labeling someone as White automatically includes them into a category of privilege which ignores the many White individuals who are on the lower end of the socio-economic bracket:

D: What does it mean to be considered White or Caucasian? White or Caucasian if you identify as that?

L: Do I identify as that? I’m Italian, that’s the way I look at it, I don’t. Skin color doesn’t mean anything it never has, you know and that’s how I tried to raise my kids the same way, it’s the character. I’m proud of what my family has done and I guess that’s why when somebody asks me then I’m Italian American.

D: So you don’t identify as you know the American larger category that they place people in like White, African American, Asian.

L: That doesn’t mean anything to me.

D: It doesn’t? So you don’t consider yourself within that category?

L: No I don’t think and that’s the problem with the country. That’s exactly the problem with the country, we look at people’s

S: Trying to put everybody in a box.

L: Yes, exactly.

S: I get that when I do orientations for my job.

L: Look at
S: That there’s only so many ethnicities that they can mark and then I go “what about?”
L: You want to measure a person measure them by their character, don’t measure them
by the color of their skin. And you’ve got an African American president you know, I
don’t care what he is, I don’t care if the guy was Asian or something else. I’m more
concerned with his character and his policies and the things that are more important to
me. If they’re going to do something well or good for the country or whatever the case
may be, it’s their character it’s got nothing to do with skin color. I hope that’s
everybody’s opinion and it probably isn’t but
D: Yeah, that’s kind of like one of these next questions. On the census or other
applications you know those ethnic boxes what do you check or do you opt not to or?
L: Yeah it’s White. That’s the only option they give you.
D: So in your opinion, you think that those large categories don’t match the needs of the
population?
L: No absolutely no. I mean, what is White?
D: Yeah
L: So if you have somebody that’s African American that’s married to a Mexican, what
box do you check? I mean
S: I run into that, I run into people that are Black mother and White father or whatever
and what box should I mark?
L: Well, define White. But you’re Sicilian and you’re dark skinned and black haired, are
you white? What box do you check?
D: Yeah that’s what I’m trying to find out is the study of how and what is the relevance of
these categories.
L: Everybody wants to pigeonhole people and that’s the problem. You can’t pigeonhole people because there’s good people in every nationality and there’s bad people in every nationality. I don’t know, I don’t look at it that way, you can’t pigeonhole people.

D: So why do you think these are so prevalent and ingrained in American ideology?

L: Politics.

S: I can tell you why. On our applications that we have to fill out, on there it states that we are not discriminating against any particular race.

L: And that’s politics.

S: They look at what’s marked on there to make sure that they are not excluding somebody or catering to a certain race and that’s why.

L: Now that’s politics. It’s just wrong, it’s just wrong. I thought when we elected an African American president some of this would go away and it’s not. It’s never gonna go away, I’ve come to that conclusion.

Conclusion

Two forms of bio-politics were examined in this chapter, the ideology surrounding the Northern/Southern Italian/Italian American divide as well as the racial categories provided by the U.S. Census. Both of these forms of categorization engage anatomo-politics. Specific racial categories and the Northern and Southern divide are marked within the physical realm. The fact that Italian Americans still distinguish a difference between Northern and Southern Italian culture refutes the logic of the census categories. The physical differences between Northern and Southern Italian/Italian American display the diversity within the overly simplified category of White/Caucasian. Although the ultimate goal of biopower, according to Foucault, is the regulation of the
population through various social controls (1978: 147) it is not a straightforward form of domination that is presented by ethnic and racial categories. Italian Americans demonstrate agency by engaging and disengaging with these categories. A detailed discussion of the diversity encompassed within the category of White/Caucasian shall be addressed in chapter six. The following chapter shall further explore the additional forms of bio-politics that Italian Americans are subjected to: political economy and stereotypical images.
CHAPTER 4
NEGOTIATING PLACE AND SPACE: IDENTITY IN THE BROADER SCOPE

Political Economy of Las Vegas: The Valley Emerges

Once, on one of my many trips back to Vegas from Washington State, I sat and watched a woman on the airplane lean far over the barrier of the middle seat towards the window to stare in awe at the famous Strip skyline. As I now considered myself a seasoned local I listened in irritation to her sharp shrill voice exclaim repeatedly “Oh my Goooooddddd just loooook at it, looooomk at it!!!!!” over and over she said as though in a trance. I glanced around the airplane cabin and recognized the similar looks of annoyance and knew these were also fellow Las Vegans. That famous skyline, recognizable to one and all from almost any country in the world, somehow failed to cast its magic on those that have now made this mythical place home. For it is a familiar lament among Las Vegans: that there are two distinct Las Vegases, the one the tourists see and cherish and the one that casts its shadow over the glitz, over the spectacle to the reality of the thousands of people who now call this desert, The Meadows, home. In the past thirty years Las Vegas has undergone astounding changes, in its demographic composition, economy and population scale. It will, no doubt, continue to grow and change as these traits are bred into the very nature of the city itself.

Indeed, I wondered if there was a way to separate the myth surrounding Las Vegas from the reality, the day to day lives of the inhabitants of this mythical city. I delved into my data collection in order to determine if this would be probable. I asked many locals, through questionnaires, to describe Las Vegas in three words or less. These
locals are employed in a variety of fields as diverse as business owners or professionals, some loosely associated with various components of the entertainment field, security, sales, administrative assistants, reservations/bookers, culinary employees and several retirees. Their answers depicted the many different aspects of the city represented in both the tourist realm and the local realm. Answers ranged from unique & exciting, overpopulated, fast, addicting, a hell hole, gaming capital, good weather, great entertainment, disgusting, too hot, diversified and breathtaking, among many other answers. The diversity encompassed within this simple description of the city sheds light on the many different perceptions that are encased within this distinctive milieu.

Miceala di Leonardo (1984) proposes that to truly understand Italian American identity, or White ethnicity one must look beyond the family/economy association that places economic success or lack thereof upon the familial structure. Instead, one must look beyond this one dimensional view and explore larger themes in relation to individuals such as the political economy (21). I am utilizing the term political economy in its most basic capacity: the interrelated structural influence of the social and political environment as well as the economic system. I have also included the interaction between the ideological framework of Las Vegas and how it relates to the economy and social setting of the city.

Di Leonardo’s work provides support for the notion that one cannot study a population divorced from the larger overarching structures that inevitably influence the formation or manifestation of ethnic identity. “Much work on ethnicity, however, defines it solely as normative behavior, ignoring boundaries, economy, and history” (di Leonardo 1984:23). In order to fully grasp an understanding of ethnic identity it is compulsory to
construct a detailed picture of all of the encompassing factors that play upon manifestations of ethnic identity. “It took the field experience itself, however, for me to understand that ethnicity, kinship and gender profoundly interpenetrate with the evolving political economy” (di Leonardo 1984:26).

This unique location presents a bevy of regulatory factors that, in turn, indeed impose constraints in regard to how ethnic identity is manifest. Bio-politics implies a regulation by the state, a specific body of regulation. However, the political economy of Las Vegas is such that it is in and of itself an overarching regulatory structure. The very nature of the political economy of Las Vegas produces a form of constraint over the populace. Outside influence is noted, outside perceptions are relevant to continually creating and building upon a package of ideas, the mythology of Vegas that must continue to allure and attract tourists in order for the system, our way of life, to continue.

How did Las Vegas become the astounding economic and cultural scene it is today? And what formed the basis of how white ethnicity would develop in the dusty desert town that became the leading entertainment destination in the world? Whiteness manifested differently in the desert kingdom of individual whims and reinvention. Las Vegas was far from the areas heavily concentrated with European immigrants in the early twentieth century. The demographic composition of Las Vegas differed greatly from these areas (Simich 2005:21). Las Vegas was founded as a township in 1905 and by 1910 Fremont Street was in existence. Las Vegas, since before the time it became a town site, offered many opportunities to Italian immigrants who came to work on the railroad and other mining related positions which offered a much quicker path to the middle class lifestyle than other areas of the country offered (Balboni 1996:2). Whiteness, or
categories of Whiteness, were much less structured or regulated. Immigrants were granted an easier path towards joining White mainstream culture. An example of this is during the 1920s, Nevada was not immune to the organization of the Ku Klux Klan, which did its best to oust Italian immigrants. Contrary to other locations, however, law enforcement supported the immigrants and helped warn them of attacks and allowed them to protect themselves (Balboni 1996:16). Though most of the original immigrants to the Las Vegas area came to work on the railroad, almost immediately economic opportunity presented itself in the form of gambling.

First workers building the Hoover Dam, then military personnel stationed at what would later become Nellis Air Force Base created a driving force to incorporate and expand the casino culture. It was after World War II that there was a rapid influx of Italian Americans to Las Vegas, almost all migrating from the larger cities on the Eastern Seaboard or Midwest region. They were quick to take advantage of the economic opportunity and prosperity in the small desert town. They quickly joined the ranks of the numerous casino employees, in a wide range of positions. Between the time frame of the Second World War and the arrival of Howard Hughes in Las Vegas in the mid 1960s, large numbers of Italian American men were found everywhere, in every position at every major casino on the Strip (Balboni 2005:148). They were especially prominent in the sports book/race book profession (Balboni 2005:150). The sports book/race book professions were directly related to gambling and betting on sports or races. Italian Americans were prominent in Las Vegas, during the 1950’s, particularly among entertainers, lounge performers, pit posses, dealers etc (Balboni 2005:151). A smaller number of Italian Americans at mid-century were professionals and others held city
positions, but the majority worked in gaming, waste-disposal or construction (Balboni 2005:153).

Many Italian Americans opened restaurants in Las Vegas. Some of the first were the Café Roma, Tony’s and the Venetian Pizzeria (Balboni 2005:152). Italian Americans were so well represented as restaurateurs that by the 1950s thirty to forty percent of Las Vegas’ restaurants were owned by Italian Americans (Balboni 1996:41). The considerable population growth of Las Vegas provided ample opportunities for Italian Americans to expand their construction and contracting businesses.

Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel is often credited with ushering in the new era of gaming in Las Vegas when he established the Flamingo Hotel and Casino in the 1940s. After Italian Americans and the mafia were inexplicably tied in the public’s consciousness due to media influences, many tourists were drawn to Las Vegas to experience a slice of Italian American culture. (Balboni 2005:151). There may have been a desire to associate with them, as they were exotics. Hal Rothman asserts that the mafia was involved, through major financing, with the Tropicana, the Sands and the Stardust, among others (2003:13). The mafia stereotype proliferated as many Italian Americans in the 1950s felt that they were scrutinized more than other ethnic groups, when trying to obtain a gaming license (Balboni 2005:155). “The Mob, Mafia, The Boys, whatever the term one uses were a major presence in the boom years of the late 1940s through the late 1960s and remained so through the corporate era (the 1980s) a predictable part of an economy based on cash transactions” (Balboni 1996:xviii). Many Italian Americans, due to discrimination or otherwise, could not operate as casino executives or head of operations. Instead they usually ran the system from behind the scenes.
According to Rothman, by the 1980s, Las Vegas was entirely corporate and legitimate as well as free of mob domination of the casinos (2003:24). “As the years past it became more and more likely that the newcomers were of only partly Italian background, had spent most of their lives in multiethnic suburban neighborhoods, had spouses who were not of Italian ancestry, and did not expect their children to marry Italian Americans” (Balboni 2005:158). Balboni asserts that Italian Americans had easier access to the upper middle class bracket in Las Vegas than Back East and elsewhere. Other European American ethnic groups fared the same as Vegas presented them with similar economic opportunities (Balboni 1996:xvii). This further cemented its status as a place of opportunity and reinvention.

**Dollars and Sense (Economy of Las Vegas)**

Michaela di Leonardo, in *Varieties of Ethnic Experience*, stresses that the workforce and economic influence does indeed carry an impact on how Italian American identity, and white ethnicity in general, is manifest. “Ethnicity is thus always both cognitive and economic, and as economies alter, so do ethnic boundaries and ideologies” (di Leonardo 1984:23). Las Vegas’s political economy is centered around tourism and entertainment and all the various dimensions these fields encompass. It is a city built on dreams, or more concretely, the dreams that the entertainment here provides. This distinctive amalgamation creates a fascinating dynamic at once both enticing and unsettling. “Las Vegas’s claim as the city of entertainment is formidable. Entertainment was always essential to the Las Vegas package” (Rothman 2003:40).

As the resort town, the city and the tourist based economy are forever intertwined. “Rapid growth obliterated the old company town and replaced it with the postmodern
metropolis, the leading tourist destination in the world and the only city in the world devoted to the consumption of entertainment” (Rothman 2003:xix). This creates a need, an almost dependence, upon the larger American populace in order to maintain the quality of life this particular economy provides to locals.

This unusual economy presents endless opportunity to enterprising individuals, who move here each year from all over the country. This is the land of paradise where waiters are on par with doctors, in terms of economic capital. I had thought this a myth myself before I moved to Las Vegas. However, once I had become more accustomed to the cultural and economic terrain, and began associating with long time locals, I found that this is not a myth yet rather a reality, and not a rarity either. “Las Vegas had perfected the service economy long before the rest of the nation encountered it” (Rothman 2003:xxiii).

In this town, educational capital is not a necessary requirement in order to earn decent or high wages and propel oneself into higher social and economic brackets. “Las Vegas has been the economic paradise for the blue collar tradesperson with a brain for more than two decades, and the Mercedes driving parade of high school educated never ends” (Rothman 2003:295). This has created a distinctive regional identity of flash but not necessarily social class or competency. One could get ahead and create a better quality of life, where in any other location of the country this would not be possible with the same employment options. Yet this way of life is fused with a dependence on the greater population, along with their perceptions, standards and wealth. “They were service workers and proud of it, beneficiaries of a unique American internal colonialism. Long before anyone else in the United States understood the principle, Las Vegans
recognized that putting smiles on the faces of visitors paid very well” (Rothman 2003:18). An example of this pride in regional identity and the division in class construction between Las Vegas and the rest of the country is when the University of Nevada (UNLV) managed to defeat Duke University’s basketball team in 1990. UNLV is an institution that caters to first generation college students. They are representative of the service-based economy of the city. The majority of participants in my study who filled out a class questionnaire listed highest level of education as high school, with the next highest rank being those who listed highest level of education as some college. In 1990 the UNLV basketball team beat Duke University and this is emblematic of Las Vegas moving towards legitimacy rather than operating outside the bounds of acceptable society. It granted social legitimacy to a town built upon blue-collar professions, demonstrating that they were on par with the over-privileged students at Duke (Rothman 2003:137).

However this dependence on the tourist based economy and outside funds can set the stage for major economic collapse if ever there is a slow down or complete halt to tourism. Currently, Las Vegas is experiencing such an economic downturn and diminishing of the formerly rapid influx of tourists. This has created a trickledown effect and locals in all different sectors are feeling the economic crunch. This also demonstrates how Las Vegas is constrained by the bio-politics of the economy and larger population body’s perception of Vegas. We are still, essentially, living on tourism or the whole economy has the potential to shut down. The Vegas of ten years ago is not the Vegas of today. One only has to drive around to notice the many vacancies in storefront windows to become aware of the startling changes that have affected the Valley in recent
years. The boom is over. Vegas is now leading the nation in bankruptcies and foreclosures. This fact highlights the fragile relationship, the fragile ecosystem built upon tourism and what can become of a place so intertwined in dreams and escapism and so dependent upon outside money.

Las Vegas presents an array of occupational opportunities that are not represented elsewhere in the country. The high wage/low skill economy allows residents to enjoy a way of life that they may not be able to partake in other cities. However, this economy also generates a continued dependence on the rest of the country in order to maintain the lifestyles evident in Las Vegas. The ideology surrounding Las Vegas is paramount to maintaining this economy, as perceptions of the city are what continue to draw revenue through tourism. In order for the service based economy to survive there must be outside interest, the public must be drawn back to Las Vegas.

Population Characteristics

For eighteen years, Nevada was the fastest growing state in the nation, but in 2009 it was ranked fourth in percentage of inbound moves (Silver 2010: internet doc). For the first time in nearly two decades, Nevada, and Las Vegas specifically, is experiencing a slow down in the rapid growth that was formerly increasing at what seemed like an exponential rate. During the early years of the new millennium, nearly 6,000 people moved to Las Vegas each month (LVMASS 2010:5). During the decade encased between 1990 and 2000, Las Vegas was one of the fastest growing areas in the country, with a population increase of eighty-three percent in 2007, the population had reached close to 2 million people (LVMASS 2010:5).
With the increase in population size came an increase in population diversity. Las Vegas encompasses much ethnic diversity, however the way ethnicity is represented, the way it pans out, differs greatly from the larger cities Back East and elsewhere. At the same time, this extraordinary location provides a glimpse into the future, in terms of demography, for the rest of the nation. “Most important, it [the population increase] has made the demography of Las Vegas more typical of the nation in its distribution of race, class and wealth, while also creating a window into the American future” (Rothman 2003:144). Also a predictor of the future composite of the rest of the country is the large Hispanic population of Las Vegas. Las Vegas is deemed the area with the fastest growing Hispanic population in the U.S. (Simich 2005:9).

Italian Americans, continue to move to the Vegas Valley, although perhaps no longer as distinguishable from the mass of other ethnicities that also relocate here, and no longer in droves as they had during the mid-twentieth century. It has been noted by several of my participants that there were not ethnic (Italian) neighborhoods that developed in Las Vegas. Alan Balboni claims that assimilation was much more rapid in the West due to this factor, as well as higher rates of intermarriage and less intense discrimination (2005:148). Current estimates of Italian Americans in Clark County are around 130,000 with a median age of thirty-eight (La Voce 2010:13).

Recent changes have been noted in regard to the demography of Las Vegas. Las Vegas has, in recent times, experienced an economic downturn that affects locals in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most evident example is the massive amount of foreclosures, bankruptcies and lay-offs. Las Vegas grew very rapidly and attracted many Italian Americans from their former East Coast residences.
Community

One of the first unique characteristics of Vegas drivers I noticed upon my arrival to my new hometown was a strong prevalence of vanity license plates, as well as a large presence of California plates. Upon further inspection I noticed that there were many license plates from all over the country, not necessarily California plates but plates from far outside of Nevada, far away from the West. It became kind of a game to me, to memorize the details of each state’s plate. Such a diversity of license plates highlights that Las Vegas is, indeed, a very transient community. I also noticed that within the three and a half years I have resided in the same apartment that I have had five sets of neighbors beneath me. A patchwork of identities form the basis of “community,” which is newly developed constantly transitioning and retransitioning in this town.

In 2010 the Las Vegas Metropolitan Area Social Survey was conducted by the UNLV Department of Sociology using a combined methodology of surveys and focus groups, and possessing responses from 664 households across 22 neighborhoods in the Valley. The majority of respondents were white, owned their own home and had some college, lived in the suburbs and over half were female. Most importantly, 75% were born outside Nevada. This survey found that neighborhoods in the urban core represented the highest rates of feeling a sense of belonging to their neighborhood and being moderately close to their neighbors, while those in the urban fringe neighborhoods reported the highest rates of neighborliness with retirement communities rating the highest. The quality of life in the Valley currently was rated as fairly good, but declining in the next ten years. The most severe economic problem rated was the availability of jobs.
Many of my research participants have informed me of the great difference between neighborhoods in Las Vegas and Back East and in the Midwest. No ethnic (Italian) neighborhoods formed in Las Vegas or none to the degree that existed in the areas in which many Italian Americans migrated. Even though no ethnic neighborhoods formed, most Italian Americans in the 1950s felt that there was a sense of community as many opted to socialize with other Italian Americans (Balboni 2005:154). While there may not have been as strong of regulation in Vegas, in regard to ethnic neighborhoods and keeping an “ethnic image,” old Las Vegas still fostered a feeling of community. An interview with Fabrizia, a long time resident of Las Vegas, who has resided in the city for close to sixty years highlights how the former feeling of community in the city has changed with the advent of the new subdivisions in the Summerlin and Green Valley areas:

*D: Okay. So do you know a lot of other Italian Americans or American Italians that live in Las Vegas?*

*F: Um that were born in Italy?*

*D: Or just or that were born here.*

*F: Uh I know yeah I know uh a lot of people but uh a lot have passed away really, my age, I have been here what almost 60 years, and you can imagine how many people I met and lots of Italians and American born in Italy and born in the United States. I mean huge amount.*

*D: Okay. So do you think that there’s a strong sense of community of Italian Americans in Las Vegas?*

*F: If we have a community here?*
D: Yes

F: Um no, no there is no, because um since they built Green Valley and Summerlin um the whole town has been divided and um so the only place that you can call Italian American is the club but very people belongs to that, cause they live too far now.

D: Okay.

F: Or they passed away, or too far for them to reach.

Fabrizia’s description of community and Las Vegas demonstrate that there has been an influx of residents to the suburbs in recent times and the effect of this transition has led to the breakdown of a sense of community. The concept of “becoming American” is indelibly tied to the flight to the suburbs. Suburbs presented many opportunities such as entrance and initiation to realms of society often blocked off at the time in other areas of the country. “The suburbs draw people of all colors whose values are classed white” (Rothman 2003:294). This concept of being “classed White” appears to resonate in several of my interviews as Italian Americans present the concept of White ethnicity as an identity that is in flux. This identity may be more pronounced in certain areas of the country, as well as in certain areas of Las Vegas and, as with many other facets of identity, it is regulated and constrained by contextual elements.

There were many differing opinions presented, in regard to community or Italian American community, amongst my research participants. Some felt that there is a sound presence of community, some feel there is not and still others feel that there is but this sense of community is definitely conditioned by outside forces. Salvatore, a middle aged Italian American man who is employed in the entertainment field, expresses without doubt that he believes there is a strong presence of community in Las Vegas still:
D: Okay. Do you know a lot of Italian Americans here in Las Vegas?

S: Yes I do, lots of them.

D: Do you feel that there’s a sense of community, in regard to ethnicity, in Las Vegas?

S: In general?

D: Or in Italian Americans, yeah.

S: Yeah I think definitely so.

Christian presents a more humorous interpretation, yet still agrees:

D: So do you know a lot of Italian Americans in Las Vegas?

A: Yes.

D: Do you think there’s a strong sense of community in regards to ethnicity in Las Vegas?

A: Yes, as long as we’re not arguing. There’s a lot.

Rachel and Tom highlight the Club as a fixed point to connect to fellow Italian Americans:

D: Okay so do you guys know a lot of Italian Americans in Las Vegas?

T: Well we know a few.

R: I don’t know what you think is a lot, we know probably twelve, fifteen couples

D: Okay in your opinion, is there a strong sense of community in regards to ethnicity, or ethnic association in Las Vegas?

R: I think so, I think certainly among Italian Americans, do you think?

T: Hmmm we belong to the club there’s a lot of Italian Americans

Fillipo recognizes that there is an Italian American community, or feeling of community, yet it is not very pronounced:
D: Do you know a lot of Italian Americans here in Las Vegas?

F: Yes.

D: Do you think there’s a strong sense of community in regard to ethnicity in Las Vegas?

F: I don’t think there’s a strong, but there is an existence of it, but I don’t think it’s strong.

On the other hand, other Las Vegas Italian Americans I interviewed agreed that there was no sense of ethnic community present in Las Vegas. Constantino illustrates that there is a different idea of community between the Italian Americans he associates with rather than the larger scope or scale of the Italian American population in Las Vegas:

D: Okay so do you know a lot of Italian Americans here in Las Vegas?

C: Yes I know a lot of Italian Americans.

D: Do you think there is a strong sense of community in regard to ethnic identification here in Las Vegas?

C: Strong is a word I wouldn’t use, the people that I know I would say yes but generally speaking based on the percentages of the Italians that are here I would say not really.

Isabella demonstrates that there is a definitive divide between the ideal, the idea of community versus the reality:

D: And do you know a lot of Italian Americans here in Las Vegas?

I: It appears so (laughs) at least some.

D: Okay do you think there’s a strong sense of community in regard to ethnicity or Italian American ethnicity in Las Vegas?

I: No.
D: No, okay, that’s interesting so even like with the Club and everything else you don’t think there’s that strong sense of

I: No I think there’s a thinking that they are but in reality they’re not in my opinion.

Adriana highlights the larger political economy as being the reason behind the lack of closeness or community found in Las Vegas neighborhoods:

D: Okay. Do you know a lot of Italian Americans here in Las Vegas?

A: Yeah, I do.

D: Okay and in your opinion, do you think there’s a strong sense of community in regard to ethnicity in Las Vegas?

A: I don’t think there’s a strong sense of community in Vegas at all, unfortunately. Just not with the Italian Americans, with any so I just and I think it’s just the nature of the town.

D: So you think maybe that’s just how the town was structured, lacking like the old ethnic neighborhoods like Back East and stuff like that and is there anything else?

A: I think it’s too transient, you know people come and go and it’s hard to build relationships, but that’s where the clubs come in and that’s probably the closest ties that it brings people together so

Still other Italian Americans view Las Vegas as presenting more of a barrier. There is an ideal presented of a community fostering closeness, a closeness which is absent in Las Vegas, according to Lenny and Susan:

D: So are Las Vegas Italian Americans different from [name of city in the Midwest] Italian Americans?
L: Honestly the biggest difference in [name of city in the Midwest]? I think the people are friendlier. I mean maybe it’s because we had that section of town where everybody grew up, that you all knew each other that just you could walk down the street and people would say hello, good morning how you doing? Everybody knew everybody. Out here? Everybody’s

S: They’re spread out all over, there’s no Italian neighborhoods

L: And they don’t know anybody. You don’t have that closeness. That’s why when they were talking about at the last meeting about nametags to me that’s not a bad idea. I remember some people, and I’m bad with names, and that would help me a lot. But I remember faces and stuff the main difference is they’re just friendlier. You could walk down the street and it’s “hey good morning.”

Over the course of our conversation, Nico, Carla and Gabriella disagree over Las Vegas and community, and then reach a consensus that the ideal of community is presented at the Club, but again, how realistic is this sense of community:

D: Okay do you know a lot of Italian Americans in Las Vegas?

N: Well just through the Club, The Italian American Club.

G: What do you mean by a lot?

N: More than five, more than six? Yeah alright.

C: But we know a lot.

N: We do know a lot.

D: So in your opinion, do you think there’s a strong sense of community in regard to ethnicity, Italian American ethnicity, in Las Vegas?

N: Yeah I’d say so. What do you think?
G: I don’t.

N: No?

G: No. They don’t see each other much out here.

N: Well, if it isn’t with the Club, you know.

G: Right, right. Well I was just thinking that’s not really a community.

C: Yeah, well it is, but it isn’t.

N: It’s commercial um

C: It’s nice that they have the Club, I don’t know how many they have, I only know of two.

G: But we don’t have that much of a membership.

Lenny and Susan explain the concept of community by referencing a local Italian American deli. They relate the change in its structure to being representative of the change in the overall structure of the city, and how it lacks a definitive sense of community. Also, again they note how Las Vegas differs from the Midwest:

D: Do you think there’s a strong sense of community in regards to ethnicity or Italian American ethnicity in Las Vegas?

L: Well that’s a good question, um not as much as there really could be. From what I understand there’s 350,000 Italian Americans in Las Vegas and I just found out about this place at the last San Gennaro so we’re kind of all spread out throughout the town and it shocked me when I found out that there were that many people.

D: Have you guys ever been to Siena Deli? I hear that’s supposed to be pretty authentic.

L: We’ve been to Siena Deli, it was a lot better when the old owners owned it. Back when he owned it, I can’t remember the guy’s name for the life of me that was more of an
authentic Italian market. They had the deli, the bakery, the pizzas and stuff that they
made up there and it was less of a restaurant you could find a lot of things that they
imported from Italy from the candies and the pastas to anything you could think of and
now they’ve kind of gone more towards the restaurant part of it and their deli I guess
that’s what’s making them the most money.

D: Yeah

L: They’ve kind of gone away from that, that seems to be there was quite a few of those
here in Vegas for awhile and it seems that it’s getting smaller and smaller

S: Too when you’d go in like when I would go in and you would ask something, they
would take time to stop and walk me through step by step how to make an actual
authentic Italian dish and the bread that they have, how I could buy them and put them in
the freezer and how to take them out and what temperature to put them in in the oven and
it makes them like it just came out of the oven fresh and they don’t do that anymore they
look at you like you’re crazy.

L: I mean the food is still good, they still have a lot of stuff there, you can’t find in any
other places but it’s, to me it was more of a neighborhood market, to me it was more of
what I remember from back in [name of city in the Midwest] when I was a kid, when they
owned it.

A sense of community in Las Vegas is up for interpretation. Some Italian Americans in
Las Vegas believe that the city does offer some semblance of community while others
believe that community, in regard to ethnicity, is greatly lacking in Las Vegas.

Apparently ethnic identity is not actively reinforced by ethnic neighborhoods as it is in
other locations and Las Vegas Italian Americans derive a sense of ethnic identity from a multitude of other factors and influences.

**Ideological Aspects of Bio-politics**

Las Vegas has been a land of contrasts from its very inception. It is a land of contrasts because it is constantly changing has a strong mythology that is very distinct from the reality of the city. I can remember driving into the city, my new place of residence, by way of the I-15 and passing by the world famous Strip which, I would later find, locals refer to as Las Vegas Boulevard. Driving in on the I-15 I found the city to be tempting, alluring, electric to young hearts and minds. Each month thousands move to the city of lights to pursue their dreams, whatever they may be. And in turn, each month thousands leave, creating a revolving door of people, culture, class and life circumstances. A transitory nature is the supreme trait of Las Vegas transitory, illusory and constantly in flux.

Christian’s tale of how he came to Las Vegas and transitioned to a local highlights the exact nature of what draws people to this city and what makes them stay:

*D: Okay then you both moved out here to Vegas later, what made you want to come to Vegas?*

*C: We didn’t we were going to Los Angeles to see her aunt and uncle in Los Angeles. And you know I’m a [name of profession] and I think I’m a pretty good [name of profession] I could get a job anywhere. So we came out to, went to see my this fella he was in the restaurant business see where my cousin in [name of city], stayed there two weeks then we drove out here. I says before we go to Los Angeles we have to stop in Las Vegas for three days. She says okay. Been here 49 years. Three days, guy I told my wife*
and daughter to stop down at the Mint downtown told my wife we were going to go to a coffee shop, have a cup of coffee and play blackjack. I’m playing some blackjack, I’m not playing five minutes, guy taps me on the shoulder, my nickname is (nickname) for (last name), he says (last name) what you doing here? I says “I’m playing blackjack what are you doing here?” He says “I’m a waiter,” he says “hey we need a [name of profession] you wanna go to work?” I said no I’m going to Los Angeles. So in those days you know New York plates, you can spot my car a mile away, I had my New York plates on, puts a note on my windshield, come and see us, we only live down the street. We went down there, he talked me into going to work at the place. We’ve been here ever since. Never went to Los Angeles and I’m glad. I’m glad.

D: Do you like Las Vegas?

C: Oh I love it, absolutely love it.

The ideological aspect of Las Vegas presents a form of regulation, an overarching structural regulation that is further propagated by the media. Ideology, in the most general definition, is a set of beliefs or ideas. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels coined the term ideology, which is used to describe the dominant ideas and representations in a given social order (Kellner 2006:xiv). There is a specific ideology that surrounds Las Vegas. The city is built around a fragile house of illusions that could, at whim, come tumbling down. Some, such as Hal Rothman, would argue that a supreme characteristic of Las Vegas is illusion. “Las Vegas does not have traditions unless they’re staged for visitors” (Rothman 2003:xx). To obtain an understanding of the constraints this ideology presents would entail an understanding of all the intricacies contained within. The
ideology surrounding Las Vegas is built upon various myths and dimensions of perception.

Las Vegas has cultivated a rare cultural niche which provides a definite influence upon American identity politics. Part of this cultural niche is the ability to transform, to transcend and to escape constraints and barriers that are imposed in other areas of the country. While Las Vegas are definitely constrained by the political economy, these constraints do not manifest in a similar fashion as the similar constraints imposed on other locales. It is the ability to transcend, to revamp that has granted Las Vegas its distinctive class system and high wage/low skill economy. “Las Vegas’s ability to change itself into the newest fashion is at the root of its success as a purveyor of the low-skill, high-wage service economy” (Rothman 2003:xxiii).

Las Vegas is often presented as the stereotypical land outside the norm of the rest of the country. What sort of vision does the city conjure? It is the fabled manifestation of get rich quick schemes, loose morals, mob image and various other stereotypes. There is power and constraint laced with this ideology. Las Vegas is indeed constrained by this ideology that surrounds the city. Particular to Italian Americans is the domination of the mafia stereotype. It is still firmly in existence and shall be further addressed in the next section of this chapter. However, this form of regulation, the imposition of a distinct ideology or stereotype, can be financially advantageous. By playing upon the mythology of the mafia in Las Vegas, the city centered around entertainment can draw more visitors and create more intrigue. Lenny explains that a new museum is in the planning phase in Las Vegas and is directly tied to this mythology (note: this excerpt as used elsewhere in the thesis but I am utilizing it here for a different point):
L: That’s a good idea, the guy that donated the $50,000 blew me away and I mean I went up to him and thanked him for that and said you have no idea what that means to me, coming into this and he says well you’ve got to do me a favor, you can write well see if you can get this place to be a historical site in Nevada and get us some money too. Still I’m working on it, through some connections I’m concentrating a lot of angles on what I want to take this and through our work we’ve got channel five and there’s a lot of stuff for World Children’s Day and I can’t remember, Rachel Smith? One of the anchors on channel 5 does a lot with our stories and I want to get in touch with her and see if they can help me, shine a better light on this place rather than Oscar’s Mob Museum downtown.

S: Right.

L: I’m still thinking of writing him too, and saying you know what? You got a bad rep for this how about helping us out with this place here and maybe this will help balance out some of your thing so I’m working on this.

It is evident that Lenny recognizes that there is a myth associated with Las Vegas and Italian Americans, and this is the myth of the mafia. He also notes that it is financially advantageous to promote this myth, but at the same time he argues that it would be more beneficial to construct a factual representation of Las Vegas Italian Americans and their everyday lives versus continuing to promote the stereotypical mafia image.

What sort of people does Las Vegas lure? From the beginning, it has attracted those who operate outside the bounds of normalcy, “proper society.” This idea of “proper society” was much more prominent during the early and mid-twentieth century. “In every other state in the union, activities that went on every day in Las Vegas could land
you a jail term” (Rothman 2003:14). Now many of the vices that provided Las Vegas’ reputation have merged with the rest of American popular culture and it no longer carries the stigma, or the brunt of the stigma often applied to the city of lights. Yet some of these vices are still, and shall always be, associated with Las Vegas. In the next section I situate some of the stereotypical images and ideas of Italian Americans into social theory to better obtain an understanding of what type of constraints these images or ideas impose. This next section also provides support for the argument that the media is a form of bio-political regulation.

Stereotypes as a Form of Regulation

While enjoying dinner one evening with several of my research participants, Nico recounted his experience of being introduced, as an Italian American, to his wife’s family in the American South nearly forty years ago:

G: Yeah, but I mean Grandma used to say “You Eye-talians, olive oil drinking”

N: Yeah, but it was the way she was raised.

C: In the South, yeah from the South.

N: Just like my father, same way, it’s the way you were raised. Her mother is no different from my old man. They were different, opposite ends but

C: Right that’s what I’m saying.

N: But they were the same and if you ask either one of them they would say “we’re different.” No you’re not, you’re just as racist as

C: Oh yeah. That is the point I was trying to make.
N: I met her uncle once and I only met him one time and she woke me up and I went there
to her mother’s house and the guy says to me, I forgot which uncle it was and he says “So
you’re one of them Eye-trains.” And I says to him “Oh good night."

C: (laughs)

N: He had a preconception of what I was, just like I had my preconceptions if you’re
from the South too, just as guilty we all do.

C: Uh huh.

G: It’s true.

D: Okay.

This excerpt underscores the fact that stereotypes of Italian Americans are evident,
although perhaps not as prevalent as they have been in previous decades. I define
stereotype by definition of: an oversimplified belief (based upon reality or fiction) that
relates to or is assigned to a specific societal group. Stereotypes provide an overarching
framework of regulation, both in regard to biopolitics (how stereotypes are spread and
maintained through institutions and ideology) as well as anatomopolitics (how
stereotypes adhere to racial classifications and are marked within the physical realm).
These stereotypes of Italian Americans are still in existence today, throughout various
pockets of the country, as evidenced by Fillipo’s similar encounter:

F: I think that they, I think that most people judge people on ethnic backgrounds. They
do. I know people in the Midwest that say “Look at that Eye-talian out there.” They
don’t say that there’s a White guy, they say there’s an “Eye-talian.” And then when I met
them they say I’m “Eye-talian.” I met someone the other day, someone said “You’re from
Philadelphia, you’re a guinea?” I wanted to slap the guy for saying that to me number one but I’m not, I don’t think that I think it’s based on ethnic background.

Paola Schellenbaum (1993) examined the various stereotypes Italian Americans of Northern California recognize and interpret amongst their ethnic group. She stressed that stereotypes are relative to cultural constructs and, in fact, can be analyzed as cultural constructs. They manifest meaning to Italian Americans and their symbolic meaning relates to the construction of ethnic identity. Ethnicity is in and of itself a process that is continuously reinvented and reinterpreted (154). Schellenbaum also asserts that identity is a creative process and that the past did not necessarily create the present, but the past is continuously repositioned and invented in order to make sense of the present reality (157).

Throughout her analysis, she asserts that it is essential to recognize stereotypes’ spatial and temporal coordinates. It is important to understand that in depicting stereotypes as cultural constructs, and the fact that they are often generalized to the entire ethnic group, that they came about in a particular context and thus are relevant to that particular context (160). She sheds light on the often obscured nature of stereotypes, and it is this obscured nature, this naturalized tendency of stereotypes that often makes them difficult to interpret and analyze. “In any stereotypical representation or perception, there are two elements at work in people’s experience: the fixed and unchanging, and the superficial and distorted” (Schellenbaum 1993:160). Schellenbaum references Geertz’ method of studying common sense as a highly organized means of deciphering frames of reference and thus, this method of utilizing common sense as a window into culture, can also be applied to interpreting stereotypes as cultural artifacts (161).
How do Italian Americans relate to these stereotypes? Micaela di Leonardo (1984) examines stereotypes recognized by Italian Americans by applying Hochschild’s (1979) framing/feeling work on emotional management. She recognized three framing rules Italian Americans applied to stereotyping: it is not discrimination, it is discrimination, or it is discrimination but not against me. She then categorized these three framing responses into the two polarized ethnic models of assimilation and ethnic revival. The first and third responses catering more toward the assimilation stance, and the second response geared more towards those that adhere to the ethnic revival (1984:163-5). Further utilizing the dichotomy between the assimilationist mentality and the ethnic renaissance point of view, di Leonardo assesses Italian Americans’ responses to ethnic discrimination. The assimilationist response entails denying discrimination or asserting that the minority group deserves to be discriminated against. The other end of the spectrum involves several different responses, fighting it with righteous anger, reacting towards it with humor or in acting rather than reacting embrace the symbols of discrimination (1984:188-89).

There are numerous other studies that detail stereotypes. Gerald Berreman (1972) details the existence of various stereotypes (in regard to manner of speech, manners, life style or fashion sense, as well as physical characteristics) that relate to social categories and social interaction in Northern India. Caitlin Cahill’s research (2007) demonstrates that young inner city women negotiate their identity in relationship to the stereotype of themselves as young, of a lower socio-economic status, urban dwellers. This study examines how place and space, and in particular a community in transition, influence the construction of identity. Phyllis Pease Chock (1987) examines irony in the use of
stereotypes centered within discourse. Her study reflects how Greek Americans create ironic discourse in relation to stereotypes and how this reflects the “flexibility and dynamics of classifications systems” (1987: 348). I examine the cultural terrain of stereotypes surrounding Italian Americans. In particular, I have situated my study of stereotypes within the realm of biopower. Bio-politics and anatomo-politics are both reflected dimensions of power in regard to ethnic stereotyping.

Bio-politics

Micaela Di Leonardo (1984) provides support for the argument that stereotypes are indeed, a form of regulation, a form of bio-politics. Stereotypes can be utilized by various forms of the media, specifically advertising, to play upon the populace’s preconceived notions of ethnic groups and in reaffirming these preconceived notions, exert power and influence. Di Leonardo takes this media analysis one step further and applies it directly to the needs of the state. “Ideologies of ethnicity purveyed by the mass media are neither just the compilation of folk ideas nor the popularization of scholarly findings, but also reflections of the needs of the capital and the state” (di Leonardo 1984:178). Constantino provides direct evidence for the regulation of stereotypes through bio-politics, in evidencing both the government and the media for propagating the stereotype that indelibly links Italian Americans to organized crime:

D: Just stereotypes of Italian Americans in general as a group that you think are out there.

C: Stereotypes uh you know I would have to say you know, I’m not sure if this is answering the question the right way or not or if I’m understanding the question the right way but you now the perception of the general public stereotypes you know wants to
make us all Tony Soprano family or the Godfather family and I think that that’s true. I see it often you know what I mean. You’ll hear remarks and people don’t understand that it’s derogatory. People don’t understand that it’s derogatory to say, “You know you’re Italian can you wipe this guy out or you must know a hit man.” You know what I mean they say that absolutely general statement without understanding how derogatory that is. It’s the same to say to a Black guy, you know, where’s your boombox? You know stuff like that, it’s just but without a question, Hollywood, the media portray Italians as bad. And also the unfortunate part is many Italians that have never known a criminal their whole life, will use that stereotype persona, is that the right word? In their favor sometimes, you know they get into some type of a beef or something like this you know and somebody’s “oh what are you going to get your uncle after me?” “Well you never know.” And I mean people say stuff like this and they’ve never known a criminal in their life you know what I mean but sometimes they’ll use that to, to what to make themselves more powerful or to get themselves out of a situation something like this, when they couldn’t fight their way out of a wet paper bag and they never knew a criminal in their life so not only certainly the media and movies and Hollywood and all that stuff and the government has helped create the continued stereotype but it seems as though the American public is fascinated by it. Oh some of the greatest movie of all time and even the television show The Sopranos like this you know it’s the most popular thing out there, people are fascinated by that. How much of it is true? You know you’re probably aware of this as much as I am what the statistics are but out of how many you know millions and millions of Italians are in this country how many of those people are criminals or have criminal backgrounds and stuff like this is a small small small minute, percentages of a
percentage you know but yet you talk about criminals, you talk about mobsters and stuff like this you know you’re right up there with the Blacks you know and then.

D: So you mentioned now that the media has a lot to do with stereotypes but the government, how does the government?

C: Well no the Rico Act was started how many years ago with Kennedy, for what reasons? You know Giancana mobsters, people who put them into office and he wanted to make a mark for himself and he went through all these mobsters. Now did they need to be taken down, yes. You know they were embezzling and you know doing all this crime that they were doing yes, but they weren’t doing any more crime than anyone else out there. You know this is a target that they could be personally recognized and that Rico Act is something that just strictly targeted the mobsters at the time, the organized crime. The government they got to, they make big headlines when they bring down Gotti, you know and the mobsters that they finally arrested and got put in jail like this you know but some of them are just extortionists, you know or murderers and rapists you know on the 2nd page, but it sells papers it sells movies and magazines and things like that so I think Hollywood has more to do with it, but certainly the government was part of this thing, you know Hoover and those guys. J. Edgar Hoover back in the day they got a lot more press if they brought down a big time mobster.

D: So you think it would be beneficial for them to like spread the stereotype or like the you know idea of Italian Americans and if so that wouldn’t really be including them into the larger bracket of Caucasian or White, it’s sort of a means to separate still

C: Well I’m not sure, you know even if it’s so intentional other than the fact that the stereotype has come forward from the old country for generations that you know back in
the day of organized crime, you know real serious organized crime, we’re talking about the bootleg years, the twenties and thirties the roaring twenties things like that there was an Irish mob that fought with the Italian mob to see, who was going to control the liquor gaming prostitution all the vices that were, there was the equivalent of the mob in different police forces in big cities like Los Angeles and things like that but none of that stuff really played up like the Italian mob did so the people that you’re talking oh well there’s government even movie producers did they just say absolutely intentionally that this is what we’re going to be, or were they just kind of driven to that because of the fascination by everybody, I think it goes hand in hand. One feeds off the next.

According to Constantino there is intention behind the creation and maintenance of the mafia stereotype. Both the government of the United States as well as the mass media reaps benefits for keeping this stereotype alive and well. Also, he believes that Italian Americans, in turn, play into the mafia stereotype and use it to their own advantage, for intimidation or other means of conflict resolution.

Some Italian Americans play with the mafia stereotype and utilize it according to circumstance. They also similarly adhere to other stereotypes that are evidenced in the media and advertising and these stereotypes are sometimes employed to gauge authenticity, both of the self and of others’ Italianness. There are various examples of these stereotypes. The concept of the warm ethnic family is a direct representation of the commoditization of ethnic identity and Italian Americans often judge authenticity vis-a-vis these constructions of ethnic reality (di Leonardo 1984:180). Isabella provides evidence for this stereotype in her description of Italian Americans:
D: Okay and if you could come up with any examples, what stereotypes are evident of Italian Americans?

I: Stereotypes, well they have like a very some of them have a very thick accent, I have an accent as well. Some of them have a very thick accent, so you know that’s one of the ways that you can recognize that someone’s from Italy as well. The stereotype hot headed, muscle people you know, so just kind of um those types of stereotypes.

D: Okay and so how do you think that Americans that are not Italians would describe an Italian American?

I: Hard headed (laughs) um they know it all, can’t change their way of thinking, they might have described them at some point in time as um just doing anything to keep a job or whatever, but I don’t think that’s the case anymore but you know I could be wrong about that. But they would describe them too as family people, very good friends, those that do make connections and do become friends.

Isabella lists several pertinent stereotypes, but most relevant to ethnic marketing and the commoditization of ethnicity is her description of Italians as “family people.” This is a characteristic frequently referenced by my other participants as well. There are several other stereotypes, besides being family oriented, that participants referenced. Lenny directly references several stereotypes used in marketing: Chef Boyardee highlighting Italians’ culinary expertise, as well as the mafia stereotype used to draw in ratings for the show, The Simpsons. He also references his own stereotypes of Italians, and included in this list is the utmost importance of family:
L: The pizza maker with the big mustache that talka like this alla the time. Let’s see, that Italians talk with their hands and I’ve found that one to be true yeah, it’s stereotypical but we do.

D: (laughs) I’ve heard that from many people, it’s interesting that you pointed it out to me.

L: I had my boss tell me one time, he says “that’s the first time I’ve ever seen you talk with your hands.” And I said, “what’s that supposed to mean?” And he said, “well you’re Italian you’re supposed to do that”. And I said, “what do you mean I’m supposed to do that?” You know it’s stereotypical but that’s what we do. Anything else? Look at Chef Boyardee. Look at I’m trying to think what else. Look at pizza places you’ll see pizza boxes with the big mustache guy with the big chef’s hat on and you know look at the Simpsons. They pull Joe Pesci and these other guys that played mobsters you know that’s you know that’s yeah that was part of the culture but it’s not the majority of what people were when they came here or even in Italy although they’re cracking down pretty hard on it now but that’s not what people were. My definition of a stereotypical Italian is somebody that has respect for their religion, has respect for their family that is hard working that their character is untouchable and their family and religion are everything to them. You know and you work for your kids.

Adriana also provides support that sometimes these stereotypical characteristics, the importance of family, eating, cooking and dancing, are relevant to the construction of her own sense of an Italian American identity:

D: So what stereotypes are evident of Italian Americans off the top of your head do you think are…?
A: Oh stereotypes you mean like people what was that guy's name? Well of course Robert DeNiro is that what you're getting at? Stereotypes like a gangster? You know so you've got the mafia so you know stereotypical Italian would be the mafia or yeah some kind of a gangster the housewife.

D: Okay so how do you think Americans that are not Italian would describe an Italian American?

A: I don't know why the word greasy came to mind (laughs) Because I certainly don't think of us as being greasy but when you said that that's what came to mind, fun loving people, family oriented, I don't know I can't if I saw someone that was Italian the thing that would run through my mind would be that they love to dance, I love to dance so that's something about me that's very predominant, predominant that I love to dance I love to eat I love to cook I love my family so those are like characteristics that I would look at if I saw somebody Italian those are the things that would rush through my head.

The media is an institution (form of biopolitics) that is directly or indirectly responsible for many of the stereotypes that continue to circulate, in regard to Italian Americans. Some Italian Americans embrace these stereotypes and acknowledge that there may be a bit of truth behind them (and in doing so, they are taking the ethnic revival response in reacting towards it with humor or embracing the symbol of discrimination). Stereotypes and in fact the media itself both create and maintain boundaries between ethnic groups. “Stereotypes and ethnic categorization create boundaries that have to be constantly redefined through symbolic negotiation, which intersects with class, gender and, even more, with the group’s status in society” (Shellenabaum 1993:164). With all of the differing degrees of identity that intersect, Italian Americans negotiate their own
identity in relation to these stereotypes as well as in relation to their own position in society (in regard to class, gender etc). Even in recognizing either the authenticity or lack thereof contained within specific stereotypes representative of Italian Americans, Italian Americans are acknowledging the symbolic reality in which stereotypes are immersed. Their recognition of these stereotypes, and often their utilization of the stereotypes to explain specific concepts to me throughout their interviews, relays the fact that the media is an extremely powerful and viable form of bio-politics. “The mass media are the final ‘boundaries’ at the points of which Italian Americans construct their ethnic identities” (di Leonardo 1984:178).

Salvatore explains how non-Italians gather their conceptions or misconceptions regarding Italian Americans, through television and the movies, and how then they actively play out these stereotypes in their interactions with Italian Americans:

D: How do you think Americans that are non-Italian would describe an Italian American?

S: Um in general they usually relate them to how they are portrayed on television which usually, the tough guy gangster type and that’s really unfortunate. Or a guy that owns a pizza joint, very it’s you know very stereotypical, that’s how they and I’ve had that experience my whole life.

D: Wow. So you’ve seen these stereotypes first hand, like people have made assumptions or

S: Yeah for example I was working for a company a couple of years ago and they were putting these cardboard corners together and this guy makes a comment to me he says “oh you should be good at this because you’re Italian and you make your culture makes
pizzas I’m sure you’ve folded pizza boxes in your life.” I look at this guy and I said, “you know it seems kinda prejudicial what you just said, just because I can fold cardboard together you automatically think I worked in a pizza joint?” I said, “that’s really kinda uncalled for don’t you think?” I said, “do you even know anything about anything?” He goes, “what do you mean?” I said, “stop watching television.” I said, “read a couple of books, you know, take a trip somewhere, see the neighborhoods or go to the Old Country see it for what it’s really worth.”

D: So are there any other examples that you have of people making those kinds of assumptions?

S: Oh yeah I’ve heard ‘em all, meatball, pasta boy, everything, they always regulate it around food cause the Italian food is so prevalent in American culture that and that’s usually with all the major, you know cultures that have major food categories like the Spanish or the Mexicans, Italians, Germans, Polish. But yeah always Italian culture it’s always about their food or it’s about who they’re connected to. And it’s really piss poor. It’s true though.

Also, in this excerpt we see that Italian American stereotypes are often regulated through the commoditization of ethnicity, in this case through a direct connection between Italian Americans and food. Salvatore also is taking the ethnic revival stance in rejecting these stereotypes and challenging them with righteous anger as he is confronted with them. Further along in the interview, he explains to me the specific category recognized within the Italian American community, of the guido. He also notes that Italian Americans observe this portrayal often in movies and then modify or model their own behavior to
accommodate it, latching on to this prepackaged form of ethnic authenticity offered by the media:

S: Usually uh sometimes Italian Americans dress a certain way and that can be exaggerated a lot in the movies but they’re really not that far off. Where I grew up in Brooklyn I grew up in a neighborhood that was predominantly Irish and Puerto Rican but I would go to Bayridge which is full Italian and even in the early 80s it was very interesting to see, girls in particular, wear their hair up really big, gobs of makeup um the heels the gaudy jewelry, I mean that’s a stereotype even for myself to say, but it was actually true, which you’ve probably seen a million times in movies. Saturday Night Fever is a great example of that.

D: Yeah actually there was a term I learned from somebody that lived in Queens and she mentioned the term guido, which I guess is a category recognized Back East

S: Yes that’s a that’s an Italian guy that dresses very shiny, jewelry, open collared shirt all the time and keeps his hair slicked back, he kind of looks pimpish a little bit, talks with a tough bravado. Girls do that too, it’s just a particular look.

D: Now do you think that’s just limited to the East Coast over there or is it ever?

S: I’ve seen it in California and I’ve seen it in every Italian neighborhood I’ve ever lived in and they all base it off the New Yorkers. Even to the point where even they sometimes they even get the bragaccio, or the bravado down you know on the speech patterns and I’m like “you’re not even from New York and you’re talking like that?” It’s like you watch too many movies. But it’s true though, it’s very true. I mean we took a trip to San Francisco last year and we went to Little Italy and Little Italy in San Francisco today is nothing what it used to be 20 years ago which was a little bit more prominent, it’s more
so Americanized it’s not as closed in like if you went to Bensonhurst in Brooklyn where it’s in a closed neighborhood or any of the Italian neighborhoods where every store is owned by an Italian person and every store, it’s a generational thing, they’ve owned these places for generations maybe even since the time their parents or grandparents came over so it’s really that big in culture. And San Francisco it’s, it’s started to spread out a little bit but every once in a while you can tell, you can see people just in the neighborhood that who they are just by their general look. And it’s usually by dress and appearance. And that in itself that’s a pseudo-stereotype because the actual prejudice on that, there’s a term they used years ago, it’s called grease ball for Italian people.

D: Oh okay.

S: Yeah and that really is a derogatory term they use that for Mexicans too, it’s the same it means it just means a low class Italian. But they have a look you know they look like you know the 50s they were like you know I guess a good visual would be like the Fonzie you know they had like the black leather jacket on the pants the work boots or long overcoat, Fedora hat I mean they were the juvenile delinquents of the representation of what actually became Italian gangs in the Northeast migrated up they graduated from there to La Cosa Nostra a little bit so that’s where that term came from and it has really nothing to do with hard working Italians but everyone gets criticized for it in that culture. Here, Salvatore demonstrates that these stereotypes are directly related to popular conceptions of class “low class Italian” and that they are representative of anatomo-politics “you can see people just in the neighborhood by their general look. And it’s usually by dress and appearance.” He also recognizes the detrimental aspect of these stereotypes in the fact that they grant legitimacy to associating the larger Italian
American culture with organized crime. They provide a distinct “picture” or “body type”/physical appearance, in which to recognize and associate with the stereotype. He also references a specific film *Saturday Night Fever*, that he feels is responsible for bringing the stereotype outwards into mainstream America.

Furthermore, Salvatore provides evidence that younger Italian Americans, who are more removed from the original culture, often glorify and try to emulate the stereotypes provided to them by the media. However, he maintains his ethnic revival stance by asserting that these stereotypes are not beneficial to the culture, overall:

*D:* So now you were talking earlier about this mafia stereotype about Italian Americans that is so prevalent are there any other ones you think that are still being used?

*S:* That’s the main one and the reason why that is is because organized crime is most closely associated with Italians than it is with all the other cultures even though that every ethnicity has a criminal element in there this is the one that’s been broadened the most out of every culture there is. It’s been glorified in movies, television it’s basically, I mean the epitome of what the Western movies were in the 60s and 70s is how mob, that type of glorification was personified in the media so what happens in, as a result of that, that the neighborhoods and some, the neighborhoods, Italian neighborhoods in particular they either like it and they play off of that or they think it’s a slap in the face. I’d say, that’s probably something that would be a half and half thing. The older generations probably would not appreciate that as much as the younger generation because that’s all they know.

*D:* And do you think maybe possibly like you mentioned some people don’t, they didn’t keep the traditions alive.
S: Probably.

D: So then they then they attach to this media image as a way to identify?

S: They all, if you’re a third, or fourth or fifth generation Italian and you see a movie like Goodfellas or the John Gotti story that’s how these kids think that their ancestorship is which is not entirely true. That was only a small portion of the people that came over and those people came over, migrated here in the early 1900s and I would say out of the thousands or millions actually there was probably only a few thousand of those type of people that were called Men of Honor that actually came over here to settle in this country. So it was a really small percentage of people. But that small percentile has kind of bastardized the culture of Italians and Italian Americans because of the criminal element and the stigma that’s attached to that. Really takes, it’s like one bad apple makes the whole apple cart rotten and that type of example is, it’s prevalent in this particular culture on a daily basis. It’s like anybody that dresses up in a suit, wears an Armani suit with a dark t-shirt, maybe has a chain around the neck, pinky ring, they all think they’re gangsters. That’s not true at all. That’s a really good example of the stereotype.

D: So you think some people celebrate that stereotype actually, they try to copy it?

S: Yeah there’s a lot of people that try to copy that stereotype. But that same look is in a lot of other ethnic cultures that epitomize it, and usually based on all the gangster films they watch on television.

A conversation with Lenny and Susan granted me the insight that, while most Italian Americans recognize the inauthentic and prejudicial nature of the stereotypes and specifically those associated with the mafia, some Italian Americans declare that there is
some degree of authenticity present in these media portrayals. Lenny emphasizes several
times throughout this excerpt that there was some truth, or some accuracy portrayed on
the show, *The Sopranos*:

*D:* So there’s one more question I have here how do you think Americans that are not
Italian or not of Italian heritage would describe an Italian American?

*L:* You’d get the stereotypical versions of it, you’d get it, until they actually sit down and
talk to somebody. It’s all it’s all the same thing was your dad in the mafia? Why would
you ask me that?

*D:* Yeah it’s a little offensive.

*L:* I mean it’s like I mean it’s just bad I mean and unfortunately you get a lot of media
that you know.

*S:* You know if it’s true you wouldn’t admit it anyway so what’s the point of the question?

*L:* You know it’s like the Sopranos.

*D:* Yeah that’s what I was going to ask about.

*L:* The Sopranos were a lot more real than people think. There was a lot more, I mean,
obviously they over dramatized a lot of it, but there was a lot of what was there, that I
thought was serious and there was a lot of reality behind all that.

*D:* I know that um, I actually did a paper on the Sopranos and I noticed that a lot of
Italian Americans, they were actually being sued by the Italian American Defamation
League, but a lot of Italian Americans like it and the

*L:* Yeah.

*D:* David Chase is actually Italian American.
L: I like it but how do I put this, when I was a kid growing up there was a lot of families that we were told not to associate with so I can understand that aspect of it, and a lot of that was pretty accurate especially in [name of city in the Midwest].

D: Yeah I just admired the show for the artistic quality of it.

L: Well the writing was incredible.

D: The writing.

L: The writing was incredible, the things that they would put in there the subtleties that

D: Yeah.

L: That people missed, that if you weren’t Italian you never caught or some of the things it was just, there was a lot of accuracy to it there really was

D: Even like with popular culture, the subtle nuances like I was the same age as the daughter watching the show and I was like I had the same clothes the hair styles, like little things and the relationships, the family relationships like I was like I just had that exact same argument with my mom! (laughs)

L: It’s the same thing with his son, where he didn’t want his son to get involved in the whole thing trust me that was more accurate than people could ever understand. I mean that’s and again that’s not the way 99 percent of Italy is but you did have that percent, the same thing here. There was a lot of accuracy to what they had on there.

D: I’ve read that they have FBI tapes of real mafia members critiquing the show and saying that they watch it and like it.

L: There was a lot of things, from what I understand things that were in the show were based on certain people. Certain things that actually did happen so it’s I just like how the show was written I thought it was brilliant.
D: I thought it was amazing.

L: They came up with new things every week and people bitched about the ending, to me that was the perfect ending.

A conversation with Nico, Carla and Gabriella provides additional support for the correlation of the specific “look” of the gangster and the media as an architect of this stereotype. They also explain that this stereotype is sometimes economically beneficial as was the case when the producers of the film Casino actually came into the Club to look for extras:

C: You know who she needs to talk to is (name) that would be a trip oh what he could tell you you want to talk old mafia, Italian anyway.

G: I know he was in a couple movies.

N: He was like…see if you were Robert De Niro you would see him sitting over there.

Yeah if you make a few bucks – who could blame him- good for you.

G: You could make money.

C: He’s very stereotyped Italian.

G: Hey ho.

C: (laughs) Yeah

G: Is he from New York?

C: I think so New York or Chicago.

N: If they were making a movie, what they’ve done in the past when they were making a movie, for instance when they were making Casino with Robert De Niro and Joe Pesci and all them, they actually did come to the Club.

G: Really?
N: Yeah looking for people for extras so we could do that couple of mob type movies

C: Oh (name friend) was in a mob type movie.

A last example of a participant adhering to the ethnic revival stance and exhibiting righteous anger towards the stereotype is Fabrizia’s, who immigrated from Italy to America as a young woman, reaction to the inaccuracy of the language portrayed in The Godfather (note: this excerpt was used earlier but to emphasize a different point):

F: Very important yes. Now see and this happened especially in the North, as you go down then, but even in Sicily now they usually have women always wearing like all the black with the, that’s what they give the image that is related sometime on tv here and I came here and it was the beginning of television and I remember they would speak in like dialect and I would say this is TV dialect, invented by Americans, it doesn’t exist. So I mean I was always really I would say, what are they doing? See I mean newspaper people should interview people you know like me and then if, they found out all these things but I noticed though they stopped that now, this false Italian dialect and um well they use the last one they used was in um The Godfather because see that happen at that time so they had to use I guess the way the Godfather spoke in the United States, I was there when that was happening so I remember but um other things, putting cotton in his mouth was the right thing either. That was stupid. Now okay, let’s go back to, you asking me what?

Fabrizia even goes so far as to deduce that the Americans had “invented” the false dialect spoken on television shows. One must wonder why and how this inaccuracy continues to manifest and support stereotypes of Italian Americans. Perhaps it is enmeshed within the power structure of the media itself, and as di Leonardo further asserts, a specific aim of
the state and government. Deducing what this specific aim may be however, for the purpose of this thesis, is too broad a scope to be examined.

Anatomo-politics

Many of these stereotypes have direct representation in anatomo-politics as well. Possessing an “Italian look” is clearly a manifestation of regulation by anatomo-politics. Adriana provides evidence for the regulation of Italian Americans by anatomo-politics, the stereotypical “look” of Italian Americans, as well as stereotypes such as “flamboyancy” that she then accepts and uses to reference Italian Americans as a group:

A: I think we’re much more colorful. In every respect whether I think our heritage allows us to be more flamboyant and get away with it I think because people I think they just expect it from Italians, you know, it’s like when I just went through my divorce and everybody tells me to go online to date. Oh gosh I’m sure you’ve heard this too. So you go online and you know there’s this guy online and he looked Italian I didn’t even have to see his name. And when I looked at him, what made me say he was Italian, he had the slick black hair he was dark he was very good looking and he had these gold chains on (laughs). So I don’t typically associate all these gold chains with Italians but when I saw him and then there he was in another picture with a wife beater shirt on, I go this guy’s Italian so then I read his bio and sure enough he was Italian. And so you know I think that, that being Italian you just naturally accept his flamboyancy so but I think that we are more outgoing as a group of people.

Nico, Carla and Gabriella concur that there is a definitive “Italian look” both in regard to physical characteristics as well as style of dress. Notice also that towards the end of the excerpt, Gabriella additionally references the social aspect, the boisterous nature of
Italian Americans, an obvious stereotype, but one she accepts as a genuine depiction of Italian Americans:

_N: Usually you can tell if a guy’s Italian just like you can look at somebody and say you know he’s Swedish, he’s got blonde hair I mean you know. You’re not supposed to be able to do that, but we all know that you can._

_D: And so what are some of the characteristics that you might recognize from... “oh that guy’s Italian.”_

_N: Your nose, oh yeah sure._

_C: Your nose. (laughs)_

_N: Roman type nose._

_C: Dead give away._

_N: Dead give away._

_G: Oh even the way they dress._

_N: Yeah, how they act and carry themselves._

_G: The way they talk._

_N: Right._

_D: And like how like what is this style of dress you mention?_

_G: Oh, yeah. I mean I really don’t ever see stereotypically a man going around in a wife beater, you know how you think Italian and you think wife beater on and I don’t really see that but you know they’ve got the shirt unbuttoned the you know._

_C: That’s the younger ones, the older ones look very nice. Very suity._

_G: Yeah that’s true._

_C: Very suity and very dressed up._
N: Back when I was, you know back in the ’60s, when I was in high school we used to everybody that I hung around with, was just about I would say 90 percent Italian, and they used to wear black slacks and if you’re hanging around in the summertime somewhere, Dago t-shirt right? You know.

D: What is that?

N: That’s just the uh wife beater.

G: Wife beater.

N: You know like the straps.

C: Undershirt.

N: Undershirt.

C: Undershirt but like a tank top would be for us, but with a little wider strap, for a guy yeah see

G: They call it a Dago T.

N: They call it a Dago T.

C: They call it..it’s like a tank top for a girl.

G: You never heard of that?

D: No (laughs)

C: Yeah.

G: And you put it on like an undershirt.

N: Yeah.

C: And it’s usually ribbed, it’s ribbed and it was an undershirt but they wore it outside, no sleeves, like a woman’s tank top would be
N: And it was not uncommon to see a fedora, a guy wearing a black fedora in those days, but I never wore a black fedora, never did I don’t know why I just didn’t.

D: So you mentioned the way they act and or talk could you give me any examples or that?

G: Usually, to me they’re louder, they talk with their hands, very social they’re in a group, boisterous you know just the way they speak, their attitude. But I will say sometimes that you get so dark you [Nico] look Hispanic.

Lenny further details the anatomo-politics of stereotypes by referencing the heavy set Italian woman whose primary domain is the kitchen, the mafia with mustaches, and the equation of these stereotypes with a lower intelligence level and justification for discrimination:

D: And I know you mentioned earlier that they were out right discriminated against with jobs and

L: Absolutely, absolutely. They had all the dirty jobs that the other people didn’t want. There were times that we were considered not smart enough because we didn’t know the language, they wer, if you look at all the stereotypes that were out there the only things we could do were: cook, make pizza, entertain, uh you had the stereotypical Italian woman that’s heavy set with the big long dress with the apron and the hair pulled back

S: It’s the way they think of Hispanics now manual labor.

L: And you’ve got the Italians that we’re all supposedly mafia with the mustaches. But you know yeah some of that stuff did happen but that’s not how most people were, most of them hard working and did everything for their family I mean I can go back to my great
grandfather did, my great great grandfather the stuff they did just to survive here, just to come over.

A conversation with Carla and Gabriella illustrates that these stereotypes are not confined to the masculine. There was a stereotype that was prevalent in the past of Italian American women being “high maintenance” and this was reflected in the anatomo-political realm with physical appearance. This stereotype can also be cross referenced with social class, as representative of a specific spectrum of the socially constructed class system evident within the Italian American culture:

C: And the women with the big hair they all had big hair and loaded with jewelry. They did, big hair and loaded with jewelry. And they were high maintenance, high maintenance women.

D: High maintenance?

C: High maintenance yeah, big hair, every weekday the hair, the makeup, the white handbags, the nails, oh yeah.

D: So you think it’s still like that now or?

C: The hair might have come down a little bit.

G: (laughs) I think maybe higher up the socioeconomic yes, but I think average-no

N: I said once, twice, three times you know, it all changes.

Nico details a direct correlation between the anatomo-politics of the stereotypical “Italian look,” wavy black hair and being good looking as being associated with the mafia. He further deduces that this is what Mrs. Cleaver, or mainstream America, is most likely to assume:
N: Well I wouldn’t categorize the advantages as you know being planned or anything like that, I wouldn’t say that, I wouldn’t go that far, but it’s just plain advantages. If you’re Mrs. Cleaver and you’re looking at an Italian let’s say, you have a little bit of a tendency to think you’re more, they think they’re more or maybe they think he’s more romantic or something like that, he’s a good looking guy or whatever right and he has black wavy hair whatever but also there’s that little mystery to when you go, you know what I mean like he might be a little “maybe he’s with the mob?” and all that crap. It’s a little of both, you know.

There are various stereotypical representations of Italian Americans. All Italian Americans interviewed referenced, in some way, the familiar stereotypes of the mafia, the housewife, the warm ethnic family and various culinary associations. Many interviewees noted the direct influence of the media in regard to stereotypes. The media is a form of bio-politics, in that it is a structural entity that poses influence over the population. There are numerous stereotypes of Italian Americans that adhere to regulation by anatomo-politics as well. Italian Americans actively engage and disengage with the popular stereotypes of their ethnic group. They negotiate their identity within and beyond the boundaries of stereotypes.

Conclusion

Las Vegas is a distinctive land of opportunity for enterprising individuals. The city has always operated outside the boundaries of “normal” or “conventional” society. Las Vegas provided ample opportunity to transition from a “not quite White” status into a mainstream conception of Whiteness for Italian Americans. Las Vegas continues to be a unique amalgamation of identities and within this amalgamation I have found that there
still exists a cohort of Italian Americans that strongly adhere to their own distinctive brand of ethnic identity.

There are countless stereotypical images of Italian Americans. These images are continuously reinforced by the large entity of bio-politics that is the media. Italian Americans cope with these challenges surrounding ethnic identity by using a number of different strategies. Some acknowledge these stereotypes with humor, others dissect them and the social meaning behind them, yet all Italian Americans interviewed took note in some way of these stereotypes which, inevitably, play a role in their identity construction as they move either with or against them. The next chapter shall further discuss Italian American stereotypical images, with specific focus on social class and the *Class Equals Culture Conundrum.*
CHAPTER 5

THE CLASS EQUALS CULTURE CONUNDRUM: MALADY OF MIDDLE CLASS ITALIAN AMERICANS

The sky was blazingly blue and the heat fumed off of the surrounding asphalt on a particularly lazy, casual Sunday afternoon towards the end of summer. The crowds were already beginning to meander into line formation behind the ticket counters. Here at Cashman Center, in downtown Las Vegas, I found myself waiting to attend a ‘51s baseball game with a group of my research participants. While awaiting the arrival of the rest of our party I found myself listening to several of the men in the group heckle each other and discuss sports related subjects. The conversation centered around an athlete who was most recently caught using steroids. Bobby adamantly voiced his opposition to the use of any sort of “performance enhancers” and the fact that athletes are “of a different class” and are often granted concessions in regard to morality and behavioral norms. Harry, the oldest gentlemen in attendance, decidedly voiced his opinion on the subject matter and in doing so also entertained us in jest. He leaned in closer and conspiratorially towards the group, animated in his discussion. At the beginning of his rather hilarious tirade he stated the fact that there is always a class divide in regard to everything, especially how one is perceived and judged by others. “If a man is rich and crazy then he is labeled eccentric. If he is poor and crazy he is labeled plain crazy. If a man is rich and cheap he is labeled frugal, but if he is poor and cheap then he is just cheap.” Harry’s social commentary, although told in joking fashion, provides a unique glimpse into how social class in considered and perceived through the eyes and experience of Italian Americans. Also, it provides support for the emphasis Americans
place on labeling and an understanding of class categories as static and directly related to economic capital.

Traditionally, Italian Americans have been regarded as working class White ethnics (Foote Whyte 1955; Gans 1962) or the ethnics that have newly transitioned into the middle class within the past fifty years. Many conventional studies of Italian Americans present their class structure with the arcane notion of class as a cultural plateau. Conversely, class (social, economic and otherwise) cannot be examined with such a reductionist strategy. Italian Americans’ unique position along the American class stratum demonstrates that they are involved within a constant process of reformattting and reconstructing their classed identity. Most scholars would now agree that Italian Americans fit into the convenient and encompassing category of “middle class America.” However, this category in and of itself is quite complex and does not represent such a ubiquitous nature as popular ideology assumes. The newness of the position of the middle class, in comparison to established classes and the instability of the position promotes insecurity as well as the constant need for redefinition and redevelopment (Lietchy 2003:3).

In this chapter I shall be investigating the distinctive position of the Italian American middle class in Las Vegas. My research facilitates a more broadened understanding of Italian Americans and their class structure. This deviates greatly from former portrayals of Italian Americans, both in academia as well as the mainstream media. Many classed portrayals of Italian Americans still adhere strongly to the Class Equals Culture Conundrum. This situates Italian Americans in a stagnant, fixed class category rather than one that is dynamic and ever changing. This framework also situates
Italian Americans into the category of “not quite White.” The unrealistic assignment of Italian Americans to the category of the working class White ethnic reduces the ability to understand all of the complexity encompassed within this ethnic group yet somehow remains so prevalent in its overriding simplicity, even to this day. This paradigm also promotes the assumption that to be ethnic, even a White ethnic, does not allow entrance into any other class strata, aside from that of the working class. While some Italian Americans find this class restriction to be quite stifling, others utilize it as a way to distance themselves from mainstream White culture. One of my research participants referred to this need for a separation as a reflection of Italian arrogance. He explained that some Italian Americans prefer to see themselves as different, as exceptional, aside from the norm. Class categories and ethnic differentiation are often a means to achieve this distancing.

My intention, with this chapter, is to tease out the interrelated dimensions of social class, focusing on physical indicators of social class within an Italian American community in Las Vegas. I shall address social class in three different segments: the performance of class, physical indicators of social class and media portrayals of Italian Americans related to the Class Equals Culture Conundrum, focusing on, specifically, the recent resurgence of Italian American culture reflected in reality television shows and also the classed concept of the guidi and guidette. The Class Equals Culture Conundrum is still ever present and though it has been proven to be antiquated Italian Americans still, unfortunately are often pegged into this category. The fact that Italian Americans utilize the class categories of the guidi and guidette is evident of a resurgence of ethnic identity and the desire to differentiate from the masses.
The position of the middle class, along the class spectrum, leaves those in this category driven to exist enmeshed between elements of duality. As I commenced my search for the Italian American middle class, neatly stowed away in the suburbs of Las Vegas, it became readily apparent that this search would inevitably lead to a complex understanding of class, a far cry from the contemporary notion of the invisible, yet ever present middle class. Power is intrinsically tied to class; my intention with this chapter is to demonstrate the interrelated workings and various dimensions of class in order to further understand the complex process of constructing and maintaining not only an ethnic identity but a classed identity.

Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984) is considered to be among the canon of research on social class. He provides a social commentary on the structure of the French class system. His class structure is a composite of many differing and defining elements. Bourdieu proposes that it is in childhood where class is both deeply rooted and divided. Depending upon the environment one encounters during the formative years, this will inevitably determine the class space one will occupy for the remainder of the lifetime. Perhaps most relevant to my study, is how Bourdieu outlines a class system that is intricately connected to and manifest within the human body. His surveys highlight how people are divided into specific social classes based upon an ingrained class system marked within the human body. This regulation of physical appearance (regulation of health, exercise, body weight, clothing styles, cosmetic application, culinary preference and body language) is a form of anatomo-politics.

I intend to utilize Bourdieu’s study as an initial frame of reference to help deconstruct the notion of middle class Italian Americans. Though his framework is quite
innovate for the time period (1970s) it is now apparent that this structure is quite
deterministic, in essence. However, his research does provide an excellent paradigm to
follow in considering the various dimensions of social class. Thus, I have constructed
class surveys in a similar fashion to the surveys he utilized in *Distinction* as well as
collected a rich body of ethnographic data to compliment the survey data.

Bourdieu’s pioneering work on how social class is manifest through physical
appearance is also reflected by Maria Laurino (2000), who asserts that social class is
directly represented in fashion and other elements of style. She relays her often
misguided fashion choices, misguided in the sense that they did not coincide with her
mother’s ideal aesthetic. This aesthetic was a great distancing from anything appearing
remotely *gavone*. Laurino defines *gavone* style as intentionally overdone, unabashedly
sexy and in your face. *Gavone* is a derivative of the word *caffone*, a Northern Italian word
meaning “ignorant person” which they used both to describe and mock Southern Italians.

Laurino details the polarized aspects of Italian American fashion and sense of
personal style, perhaps best exemplified by the ongoing rivalry between the Armani and
Versace houses of fashion. Armani favors the more subdued, elegant, classic fashion
(Northern style) while Versace is colorful, outlandish and inventive (Southern style).
This fission is further scrutinized by Anna Wintour, Vogue editor in chief, “Versace was
always the sort of ‘mistress’ to Armani’s wife.” (Laurino 2000:55). This divide is echoed
in my own research, as I found dissimilar participants would react differently to me,
based on my own attire (subdued versus more “bling”). Apparently this fission still
exists. Many of my research participants have voiced the proclivity for dressing “sharp”
or “flashy” yet still hold very firm beliefs on what a paradigm of elegant attire requires.
Walking the line between *gavone* and chic echoed the necessity for Italian Americans of a certain generation to walk the line between Italian Americanness and the more refined aspects and appearance of unhyphenated Americans. Similarly, the class divide between Northern and Southern Italian style is also a notable factor as to how class is manifest on or within the human body.

It is evident that Italian Americans fluctuate between the different spectrums of the traditional class system. The middle class is balancing upon a precariously constructed position “between” and are constantly in a state of “becoming” or redefinition. Mark Liechty (2003) proposes that class is not static, but rather a fluid construct and it changes in conjunction with the social currency and social capital it provides. Class is a cultural process in and of itself. Class is not universal and cannot be divorced from the political economic structures in which it is enmeshed and engaged. Liechty emphasizes the importance of examining class as an everyday experience, played out upon the stage of daily social interaction. The unique location of Las Vegas provides Italian Americans with this flexibility to enact in their daily lives components of some aspects of lower and upper class and sometimes elements of neither. While engaging with the research population, and acutely observing all of the fluctuations within this middle class structure overall decidedly reflects the middle class consumerist culture proposed by Liechty accompanied with the self- consciousness that arises in regard to the unreliable and constantly recreated nature of their position. The separation and divide (from both above and below) the spectrum of middle class emphasized by Lietchy is represented within the Italian American community. In this chapter I demonstrate how this distancing is manifest in everyday interactions.
Liechty critiques Bourdieu as reproducing the incessant need to categorize and define rather than to experience class as a process continuously unfolding. Liechty presents class as an ongoing process rather than a static category. This is a deviation from Bourdieu’s commentary on class within French society, and while it remains a landmark study it is still decidedly deterministic in regard to its limited portrayal of the class stratum. Bourdieu does in turn gleam light upon the defining characteristics of class and the various avenues through which class is manifest, however the central structure of his theory does not obscure the fact that class is, indeed, an ascribed category.

I have found throughout my engagement with an Italian American community in Las Vegas that class manifests in many different realms. Class holds various meanings for participants, outside the standard economic scale of class. Some members did rely on the standard scale of economic prosperity when gauging class distinction. However, the members that possessed more educational capital immediately recognized a distinction in regard to this particular class market. One member, after completing an interview, directly referenced education as a marker of distinction: “Do you are you going to do anything with maybe discerning your information based on education? You know somebody that has, and I’m not disparaging anybody, but somebody that has a greater level, or you know high school level or PhD level is going go give you different outlooks in their answers than, and they all might be the same but I would be surprised if that was the case.”

The intention of the middle class is to forge a distinct separation from classes both above and below them. They accomplish this through participating within and maintaining a culture of consumerism (Liechty 2003:11). Middle class is, in essence,
defined by the accumulation of goods, which provides a form of social currency (Liechty 2003:11). This consumer driven culture, and the symbols it produces are played out in the everyday lives of Las Vegas Italian Americans. I have found that there is a distinct reliance upon labels among a certain constituency of participants (Louis Vuitton, Coach and, of course, Cadillac). Perhaps no other symbol is as evident of middle class consumerism, and in particular, Italian American middle class consumerism as the Cadillac. The Cadillac brand is befittingly described as:

For over a hundred years Cadillac has stood for iconic design, artful engineering and a love of innovation. It has been the automotive expression of the American dream, built for people who believe that it doesn’t matter where you came from, just how far you want to go, and how fast you want to get there. [Cadillac website]

Although Italian Americans have been comfortable climbing the class ladder, sometimes they revert back to a style frequently labeled *guido*. In November of 2009, a reality television show debuted on *MtV* which ignited a firestorm of controversy. Immediately after airing several Italian American organizations were pressuring *MtV* to pull the plug on the television series, encouraging advertisers to pull their commercials, and even going so far as concluding that the show promoted ethnic bashing. *Jersey Shore* presents an amalgamation of eight young adults (almost all of Italian ancestry) in their twenties who are proud proponents of *guido* culture, a unique brand of Italian American youth culture found primarily in the Northeast of the country.

These reality show participants display unapologetically bombastic personalities and intentional display of “gaudy” style perhaps best exemplified by Paulie DelVecchio’s now infamous quote, “I was born and raised a *guido*. It’s just a lifestyle, it’s being Italian, it’s representing family, friends, tanning, gel, everything.” This quote represents, perhaps the ultimate show of consumer culture. The stars of *Jersey Shore* fluctuate
between high and low elements of class, which is directly demonstrative of the insecure position of the middle class. They ride the line between these divisions which entail an active negotiation with one’s classed identity, and this is an evident characteristic of middle class culture. Some of the young adults on the show embrace “low class” culture, though they are from privileged backgrounds. An example of this is the desire for tan skin, which is a traditionally “low class” or Southern Italian trait. Some of the participants even have tanning beds in their homes. *Jersey Shore* provides a juncture viewpoint between the two classes. Perhaps there is not such a distinct polarity between classes, as the traditional middle class model would assume. While some Italian Americans distance themselves from the working class culture, others proudly proclaim proximity to it. The pendulum has, perhaps, begun to reverse itself in terms of White ethnics formerly wanting to distance themselves from ethnicity now wanting to brazenly flaunt it and seeking out ways or markers of differentiation from the masses or White culture. Clearly the concept of class is quite complex and in this chapter I shall draw out the main elements of Italian American class as well as demonstrate that middle class culture is manifest through everyday interactions and is constantly being redefined.

Drawing from in depth surveys which follow Bourdieu’s format as well as ethnography, I assert that Italian Americans belong within a unique class niche that continuously fluctuates according to circumstance.

**The Performance of Class**

Las Vegas presents a hybrid form of the middle class. Driven to be situated above, in terms of economic capital and below in terms of educational or cultural capital, Vegas is a unique milieu. Las Vegas is a place where class, in all forms, blends and
bends creating a truly unique phenomenon. It is a place where waiters may routinely earn a hundred grand a year and this locale that hosts such an amalgamation of capital social, cultural and economic provides the perfect context for which to study class. Are class and culture one and the same to Las Vegas Italian Americans? How does one truly differentiate between the layers of class? Is this a possibility? The subtle nuances of class are so marked within this population, the various lines of social and economic segregation are etched so carefully could one ever hope to deconstruct them, to truly understand?

Mark Lietchy (2003) describes a class/caste dichotomy amongst members of Kathmandu where cab drivers could be earning five times as much as government officers yet be marked in a much lower caste system (2003:65). Similarly Vegas presents a dual edged stratification system with the bountiful availability of high wage/low skill jobs. When one can earn a comfortable middle class income, own a house, pay off the cars why is higher education necessary? Lietchy acknowledges that “class” as a concept is not as neatly devised in practice as it is in theory (2003:64). We speak of class in concrete terms, but how does one find objective criteria to describe class? (2003:67). In Las Vegas flash does and does not equate to class. Vegas presents a very flashy stylized persona, as evidenced by advertising. Due to this it is the land of quick money and money without pedigree. The distinctive Vegas style of class is indicative of the newly emerging middle class that, similarly to the middle class of Kathmandu, hangs in the balance between the high and low. As the class stratum is continuously in flux, in Las Vegas, it is necessary to devise several different criteria when considering and deciphering the various realms of class present within this inimitable city.
Mark Lietchy (2003) outlines two different methodologies for narrowing down the complexities of class. One is performativity and the other is narrativity. The theory of performantivity is applicable to my study of Italian Americans. Lietchy describes this theory as, …. “theories of performativity are built around a distinction between deliberate or intentional behaviors (“performance”) and behaviors that are enacted and embedded in complex cultural contexts that shape or “script” cultural performances in significant, though not necessarily absolute, ways (“performativity”)” (2003:23). Lietchy asserts that the concept of performativity allows a glimpse into the constantly revolving class structure. This unique way of perceiving and understanding class allows more flexibility and facilitates and understanding of class as a cultural process that is played upon and acted out by those within the class cultural niche (2003:23).

Similarly, Erving Goffman presents his theory as “life as a stage,” in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life (1959)*. In his theory he utilizes the theatrical stage as a metaphor for life, upon which everyday actions are played out. He contends that every minute detail within an interaction or singular action by an individual holds some kind of social significance. At the center of this theory is the recognition that we as social actors are definitely consciously, or at times subconsciously, aware of the impression we give to others in the same social arena. Minor actions and details within an interaction are often intentionally placed by the social actor, thus it is imperative to recognize even the seemingly insignificant facets of an interaction.

Class, as defined by Lietchy, is not a constant category. Rather it is a process continuously unfolding. “Class is real, but its reality is something that never exists outside of its continuous production and reproduction in cultural space” (Lietchy
2003:255). According to Lietchy, there are specific class spaces that are created and maintained through the active process of class itself. “It is in fact through the ‘performance’ of middle class life that the middle class makes and claims space” (Lietchy 2003:255). By studying specific class practices and spaces we can garner an understanding of class itself as a reality to those that experience it within these everyday interactions. “It is through the endlessly repeated and reenacted spatial claims of class practice that class becomes a reality—a ‘social fact’” (Lietchy 2003:250). Places such as the Club, are indeed locations created by social class practice. The Club allows for the creation of a social stage upon which to play out interactions which when combined, provide a glimpse into the fluctuating construction of Italian American middle class life.

“…class practice locates people (either inside or outside the collectivity) and creates locations, conceptual and material spaces of, for, and by class” (Lietchy 2003:265).

The Italian American Club is a cultural space, a stage for which to reaffirm and represent White ethnic identity. This cultural space is often created and acted out at meetings. In a way this performance relates to a performance of symbolic ethnic identity. The Club is a forum for middle class third and fourth generation Italian Americans to assert their Italianness. As Alan Balboni notes in *Beyond the Mafia* (1996) ethnic related organizations do provide a way for third and fourth generation Italian Americans to practice symbolic ethnicity (124). The Club also provides a space for first and second generation Italian Americans to reaffirm their ethnic identity. It is not a residual ethnicity that is represented, but rather an unfolding of the interrelated dynamics of ethnicity and class. “Class cultural practice ‘takes place’ by transforming specific spaces into arenas, or stages, for the performance of its own class logics and narratives” (Lietchy 2003:257).
Italian Americans at the Club actively carve out a class niche, in between both the class realms as well as between the generational realms.

**Dinner and a Show**

Over the span of time encompassing summer 2009, there was much debate and infighting at the Italian American Club, so much so that meetings began to be described by members as “Dinner and a Show.” There were several issues that divided the members: Club politics, Club by-laws, ethics, Club management strategies, amongst the standard personality conflicts and clique divisions. The lines were often clearly drawn between the various constituencies evident at the Club. Drama and intrigue are constant human dynamics and are also steadily present at the Club and, at times, persistent forces. There was often a hot/cold reception of myself by several members based on these shifting alliances. My goal was not to align with any specific party but to maintain neutrality, however this was not always an attainable goal and I sometimes found myself defined by my association to others. These shifting alliances provide shifting frames of reference, shifting vantage points from which to understand this particular group of Italian Americans.

During this turbulent time period in Club history, there were constant changes evident in how the Club was run, as well as flux in Club management and employees. In the those summer months I conducted many of my interviews, and it was during one of these interviews that Club members expressed their displeasure at observing so much discord amongst their fellow members:

*L: My boss is like that.*
S: We have the same boss and he’s very much like that. It’s this way or no way and you are wrong.

L: You can, I could, I mean look at the meetings

S: (laughs)

D: (laughs)

L: If I’ve got something to say, I’ll say it I don’t care if I’ve been there a day, ten minutes if there’s something that I don’t agree with I’ll tell them.

D: Yeah.

L: You know that’s why I voiced my opinion. I went to that one meeting and just sat there and I’m like they’re all arguing over piddly stuff and that’s when I went to the secretary and I said you know this is like Northern and Southern Italy arguing back and forth and she says why didn’t you raise your hand and say something? I said because the last meeting I raised my hand and said something and some people liked it and some people didn’t. She says well write me an email. I was shocked that that’s what became of it, but that’s what started it, I had something to say and I’m going to say it. And people aren’t going to like it and are going to like it, I don’t care. You know it’s the way I feel and if they want to disagree with me, sit down we’ll talk, tell me your point of view. I’m not afraid of that, I’m not close minded to listen to somebody’s point of view. I still may tell you you’re full of shit but

D: Yeah, there’s a lot of conflict in the meetings.

L: Oh it’s crazy, what goes on in there is insane.

S: Dinner and a show.

L: Exactly you know.
S: Dinner and a show, we’re like okay.

L: We’re all here for one purpose you know this one wants this, this one wants that, I don’t want anything, all I want is you know to be with some people and I miss the dinners and the family discussions and I miss all that, and that’s all disappearing and them being able to help you know kids get some money to go to school, that’s even better. The arguing? That’s crazy.

S: Reminds me of our children, they’re both right and neither one will give an inch.

L: Right yeah.

S: And sometimes they’re still that way but they’re out there now on their own so it doesn’t matter, got caller id (laughs) and if they’re fighting you just don’t answer the phone.

L: That’s true.

Lenny and Susan provide a humorous depiction of the goings on at the average meeting.

“Dinner and a show” is a description several other members have alluded to, when referencing meetings. In this section I shall provided a detailed analysis of these meetings focusing on how class divisions are evident, what criteria provides the basis for these divisions and how class is “performed” on the stage that is the monthly meeting at the Italian American Club. The following excerpt details one of the complex interactions that creates both social class and a class location:

Afterwards we sit down and the meeting is called to order. Someone says that it’s a shame that some people grumble about standing up and don’t give the pledge the full salute it deserves, especially considering the young men and women who are dying for our country.

Old business is addressed. The minutes from last month’s meeting are read. Again the topic of missing money is addressed. They try to devise ways to make up this money and once again [name of member] is thanked for saving the club with his loan. [Name of
member] is seated at the front table with the president and secretary, as he is now the new vice president of the Club.

The president broaches the subject of what has been occurring in the Club, with all of the drama and fighting. He says he is so disappointed in several people and that he will never consider one person his friend again (later Gabriella would swear that he mentioned [name of member] but I didn’t remember hearing it, also [name of member seated nearby] would say, the president finally got some balls). The president, in his utter frustration latched on to one of the famous motivational speeches of our time when he said we should ask not what our club can do for you, but what you can do for your club. Then he said how sick he was over the fact that he was attacked by this individual, he said if he had been in his position he would have considered, hey the poor guy, he lost his son you know and would have left it there. He continued this diatribe for several minutes. Everyone stared on in silence.

Eventually, one of the newest club members, piped up. He stood up and said shame on “you,” you being the ubiquitous yet somehow anonymous member. He said he is pissed off, and how dare you try to take “this” away from him and his children and how dare you try to rob me of my heritage. He says that he has been to the last four meetings and he can’t believe what he’s seen and heard. Then he tells everyone that he is in the midst of getting the Club established as a historical landmark and will not rest until this feat is accomplished. He then closes his outburst with “you messed with the wrong Italian.” At this point he was practically shouting. I thought wow, this guy is very passionate about his heritage.

To add more fuel to the fire, or perhaps to atone for his misdeeds or offer some sort of appeasement, [name of member] makes his way up to the microphone next. He begins his speech with a vocabulary lesson for the audience, in Italian. He mentions an Italian word (which he claims to having just learned from [name of member]) that translates to teamwork, brotherhood or camaraderie. Then he explains, in his view, what is wrong with the Club and why we are missing this crucial element. His solution? We all need to ban together and help raise money for the Club, by setting aside our differences. He explains that the 50th anniversary of the Club is coming up in June and he has an idea to put out a book of advertisements where members can purchase a quarter of a page for $25 and write whatever they want and add any pictures they want. He brings up the example from ten years before saying “I know you all remember this.” At which point several women around me confirm that yes, indeed they do remember the ad page. Someone at [name of member]’s table asks him if there can be $15 for a smaller piece of the page. He adamantly declares that no the price is ONLY $25 they will accept no less. Then another woman at my table says they shouldn’t be so picky and should be happy for ANY donations. Gabriella whispers to me that she has a new plan to find me a guy and that plan entails taking out an ad with my picture and listing my age and her phone number as a contact.
There is much detail in this excerpt. It is apparent that the meeting is a stage for which to display the performance of middle class life. There is emphasis on the civic responsibility of Club membership, playing specific roles within the Club, and the need to maintain an ethnic identity. The Club’s function is different depending upon whom you ask, yet it is evident that it is a cultural location created by class practice. Perhaps most notable, amongst the roles played by members, is that of the noble defender of the Club and in turn, Italian American ethnicity. The Club remains a representation of a collective idea, a collective presentation of ethnic identity. In the excerpt described above several members are acting out these types of roles and voicing their righteous indignation over the continual infighting and grudges that are, in their opinion, the primary cause for the current divide. The need to work together is continuously emphasized yet I am reminded of something a member told me when I first arrived at the Club: Italians don’t get along. I have often heard this phrase repeated. It seems that this viewpoint is reflected often as members act out these roles and continue to argue over the validity of their roles and the necessity to recognize everyone’s individual contribution to the Club, the deeds done on behalf of the Club. By recognizing individual contributions it seems that individuals desire to forge a connection to the Club by this recognition; yet in the process they are defeating their main aim or focus which is to contribute to group solidarity and the preservation of their distinctive cultural and classed location.

The following excerpt further details the divide at meetings and again, how meetings are a stage upon which class and culture are enacted:

*Gabriella keeps harassing me to eat. She is always concerned if she thinks I am not eating. I always mumble that I do eat, just slowly. I do end up finishing my food. She informed me that they had forgotten to get cake so someone had to run out last minute to get some.*
Next they discuss old business. There has been a new manager appointed to the Club. Here, it is very apparent that there is a huge separation between the various constituencies in the Club and community. It is highlighted by how they are positioned in the tables throughout the room. Towards the right of the banquet room sits all the older major players in the Club, several former presidents, who while still command respect no longer participate in the majority of the Club functions and politics. A member says these are the people who want the Club to shut down so they can collect the “payout” that everyone presumes will occur, yet she assures me that this is not the case. Towards the left of the room sits many vocal members this constituency, a member informs me, are the ones that don’t want anything to change yet fail to see that if there is not change the Club cannot possibly survive these tough financial times. Towards the middle of the banquet room, in the back, is where the neutral party sits. They are neutral to most of the happenings yet are definitely their own niche, their own standing in the Club politics. They are the most forward thinking group, constantly devising marketing strategies and other ways to draw up money for the Club. It is evident that they truly love this place and don’t want it to shut down. Though, at times, they have been known to boycott the Club when they were unhappy about a certain policy or there was an argument (serious about the Club or otherwise) with the other constituencies (specifically [name of members] who they view as puppets).

The secretary and vice president introduce the new Club manager and his father to the crowd. The father’s name is [name] and he will be co-managing with is son also named [name]. Although the new manager is quick to emphasize that his son will be really running things. He tells a little about his life: he has ten kids, most of which we’ll probably see around, has been in the entertainment/hospitality business for years and has worked with various celebrities including Tina Turner. His son [name] came up and stood next to his dad, smiled and joked with him. I noticed that their table is on the far left of the room, kind of isolated from the rest of the members. It is a full table with mostly middle aged people, an even number of men and women.

The discussion begins, centered around the lease of the Club to the manager. Essentially, they will be paying the Club $5000 a month to operate it. They will also take care of all repairs inside the Club and the members will only be responsible for outside repairs and the Clear Channel advertising sign, located at the street edge of the parking lot, which is also a very valuable money maker for the Club.

[Name of member] pipes up from the right side of the room. As a former president he feels it is his responsibility to make sure the lease terms are on the up and up. He says “I don’t know these people from Adam (indicating the new managers) so it’s nothing personal, but I just want to make sure that the Club is covered and that there is no way that we can lose control legally later on, if there has been a mistake made in this lease agreement.” To this the president and vice president assure him that an attorney has reviewed the document (attorney present- far left back of the room) and that it is indeed on the up and up. Another man, at [name of member]’s table stood up and declared that someone anonymously mailed him a proposal draft and that this draft, if enacted, was
completely illegal. He said he saw a plain envelope in his mail stack, with no return address. He was going to throw it away, but for some reason he opened it. Then what he saw shocked him. He paid $600 to have his own personal attorney review the document and the business proposal it entailed was indeed illegal. He brought the document to the front of the room and presented it to the secretary. The secretary sighed in exasperation and said that this document, this proposal was never enacted. It was a plan, that’s what a proposal is, just a plan. She said it is irrelevant and then she ripped it in half. The room erupted in applause. She said there, problem solved. The man went back to his seat, but there was more banter. Christian then got into the mix, engaging [name of member] and asking him where he was when the Club needed him? How much money did he donate to the Club? Everyone knew that [name of member] had donated $50,000 to the Club when it was in dire straits a few months ago. Then [name of member] declared that yes he was involved and had over the years given his blood and sweat to the Club and had donated money as well. Gabriella whispered that yes, everyone knows that he was very involved and did so much for the Club but that was what, 22 years ago? What has he done lately?

Some of the members wanted to see a copy of the lease agreement. A woman on the left side of the room (who always asks questions) wanted to know again what the members would have to pay and be paid by the new leasees. Christian reiterated the main concepts of the lease as well as the financial arrangements.

The representatives of the various committees were then given the floor. Most had nothing new to report (social, entertainment etc). [Name of member] filled the members in on the Valentine’s Day dance, for which 12 members attended but they had fun anyway because lots of outside people attended.

I made my way back to the table, explaining to Gabriella that I had a feeling that I would win the raffle. [Name of member] passed and joked “where are we drinking tonight on you”? Members began to mill about and either leave, go to the bar, or break off into small groups to socialize. I ended up at a nearby table with [name of members]. [Name of member] nodded towards the group of men in front of us and said “I’d never let you date him” when one of them came by to ask me what I had won and congratulate me. He was among [the man who had spoken earlier]’s constituents. She also said, look at how they’re dressed (I noticed nice, dress slacks, polo type shirts, gold bracelets and unbelievably and stereotypically several had pinky rings on). She said “don’t let it fool you, they dress nice but they still want to shut this place down.” Another woman nearby asked “when has he last been here? Does he even know what goes on?” Again [name of member] reiterated that what they did for the Club was so long ago, but how are they helping now?[Name of member] informed her that he’d be a few minutes they were having an impromptu board meeting in the back.

Again, there is much detail in the preceding excerpt. Perhaps most evident is the emphasis on the Club itself and the various ways members relate to it. There is also
emphasis on the roles each member plays and how they contribute to the functioning of the Club. This excerpt most reflects Goffman’s “life as a stage” theoretical standpoint. The banquet room itself is situated as a stage would be situated. Members intentionally segregate themselves into their designated groups. The divide amongst members is most emphasized in the physical plane. It is apparent that members are cognizant of how they are perceived by others, even to the point of situating themselves into an actual, physical divide in the room.

The meeting itself is, as most members often note, quite theatrical. Again the various constituencies at the Club divide themselves, and also other members, into various social roles. Here, the divide is concentrated upon viewpoints regarding the future of the Club itself. Also, each person that spoke out in the meeting wanted to be sure and emphasize how he or she has contributed to the welfare of the Club. The role of the noble defender of ethnicity is again pinpointed during meetings. Each member is also quite aware of the role that they portray to others at these meetings. There is also a divide present between new members versus more established members. In voicing how they have each contributed to the maintenance of the Club, and in turn Italian culture, they also utilize not only specific deeds but also length of association with the Club as points of reference to further support their arguments.

It is clear that the meetings provide a focal point to emphasize culture and a justification for why there is a need to maintain cultural institutions such as the Club. Each member that spoke out during the meeting was asserting their own viewpoint, how they specifically contribute to the functioning of the Club and playing a role upon the social stage that is the monthly meeting at the Club.
An area of the Club where class differences are perhaps most evident or pronounced is on the bocce courts. The courts are themselves not essentially property of the Club; they belong to the public park behind the Club. However, the bocce league that is an invitational league and runs two seasons fall (Sept-Nov) and spring (March-June) is exclusively a product of the Italian American Club. It is organized and operated by Club members, though one does not have to be a Club member to participate. In fact, many of the bocce players are not members and do not normally patronize the Club. It was through my own participation in the bocce league that brought me closer to my research participants and allowed me to become a fully fledged member of the community. I remember discussing my initial research with Dr. Alan Balboni who advised me, and in doing so fondly remembered the time he spent on the bocce courts, that one can obtain so much information just listening to all of the conversations that occur out on the courts; however, it is sometimes hard to transition this information down into scholarly material. Perhaps the most evident slice of scholarly material the bocce league has imparted is regarding class distinction. I remember one particular evening when the class clash out on the courts became particularly evident and sparked the inspiration to include this information as a section of my thesis work:

I arrive at the Club and cart my lawn chair to the back bocce courts. I am careful while walking over the cracked pavement in the parking lot, not to trip, as I am wearing my customary heels. I pass the back gates, white with black letters IAC past the lower pool blue wall that separates the yard from the back “employees only” entrance to the Club, past the older two bocce courts still in the Club yard, now covered by picnic tables and through the back fence in gate to the courts. I find June and our team. Again, it is very hot outside. I try to sit so as not to face the sun. We are playing one of the best teams in the Thursday league. We begin the game. We end up winning two and losing one. We are playing an interesting team. They are quite different than most of the bocce players here. They dress in expensive labels, expensive sunglasses and bring their dogs to the
bocce matches. One guy, who I guess to be in his mid-thirties, brings his father and girlfriend to the matches. His father gets quite involved in the game, and dresses like an old-style Italian guy in lose fitting button down cotton shirts and quality leather slip-on shoes, without socks. I could tell they’re quite upwardly mobile by their conversation, and the fact that they frequently talk about business, traveling, golf, trips to ritzy areas etc. They also carry their phones and frequently answer what appear to be business calls. It is not hard, nor intentional, to overhear conversations on the bocce court. When you play bocce you are playing in quite close proximity with not only your team, but the other team as well. It appears that several members of the team are employed at either a law firm or an advertising agency. They carry themselves as though they were raised with money, an ingrained sense of entitlement that contrasts greatly with many other bocce players. Larry sidles over to offer some advice to June and I and I notice the difference. How can one discern social class? It is rather hard to pinpoint accurately with the naked eye, but any difference, no matter how minute, is able to be picked up by a vigilant observer. Larry has tattoos and wears tattered t-shirts and baseball caps. He speaks in a different vernacular, using “gonna, gotta,” and other words that the other team does not use. They speak in newscaster English. Larry also frequents the nearby Burger King, usually bringing food with him to the court. He also smokes, as does June and many other bocce players. Larry carries a huge refillable Big Gulp container with American Choppers painted around the sides. The other team drinks out of water bottles and do not smoke. They bring expensive looking lawn chairs, in great contrast to June’s beat up chair, purchased at the dollar store that she carts around each week.

This excerpt details some of the distinguishing characteristics in regard to social class that are evident on the bocce courts. It is interesting to note that my classed description of the bocce participants is focused on the physical realm, that which is observable to the naked eye. Perhaps class based distinctions are most observed or represented in the corporeal realm. These subtle nuances shall be further detailed and assessed in the next section which addresses class manifest in the physical realm. All of the bocce players described in the excerpt above are all White by their own self-categorization. Some are Italian American, some are not. However, this excerpt details the great class diversity that exists within the realm of the White ethnic category.

During the spring and summer months that I conducted my research I was relentlessly hounded by several of my research participants to submit to their interference
in my love life, hence the title of this section. At this particular point in time I had been participating within the research community for an extended amount of time and was quite familiar with many research participants. These same participants often felt the need to take me under their wing and, as they did with other young single girls in the community, find me potential dates. Though nothing really became of these “fix-ups” their dating criteria, and how their scheming manifested, in particular out on the bocce courts, provided me with a glimpse into the complexities of social class representative of this particular group of Italian Americans. One of the many examples of these “fix-ups” is detailed below:

I was sitting in my lawn chair casually awaiting my turn at bocce. Gabriella bounded up behind me and surprised me. She had one of her curiously innocent yet at the same time devious expressions. She said the words I feared hearing again “I have someone I want you to meet.” “Oh no,” I tried to protest, tried to claim “I couldn’t possibly.” But she was insistent. She would not leave the court and said she’d wait until I had shot once again and then we’d hurry away into the Club and I could meet the young man, only 26 and a really smart guy (cute to boot). I let her lead me in, deaf to my protests. We entered the ballroom, Gabriella hoping that he had not left yet. I was led over to a relatively attractive young man and was introduced to him. His name is Carlo. We make small talk for a few minutes and then, because I must return to my game, tried to excuse myself. Not to be put out, Gabriella suggests that I show Carlo and his friend Dino the bocce courts out back, as they are interested in learning and playing the game as well. As I lead them through the bar and the kitchen through the back employees’ entrance and across the back yard of the Club, I learn that Carlo is from [city in the Midwest] and Dino is from [city on the East Coast]. They have been out here only a few months and work together at the same position at [location on the Strip]. We get back to the court and I’m still trying to make small talk. I have to shoot then so I hurry over and shoot my balls. When I return to Carlo, Mo and Christian are now turned around and the guys introduce themselves to them. Carlo claims that he doesn’t know bocce and Renee says “What kind of Italian are you? There’s no excuse.” Dino tells us that he used to play as a child with his grandpa who had a court in his backyard. I keep trying to catch Gabriella’s attention with knowing looks but she starts talking about [name of city] with Carlo. I shoot a few more times, not very good shots, but not too bad. Larry, a man on my team, comes down to our end sees Gabriella and turns around. We finish up the game, my team loses this match (we won the first two). Gabriella asks if I’ll go back to the Club I say I don’t know and ask if she is, she says yes. I say I guess but I have to put my chair in my car. I start up the walkway after Gabriella and realize that Carlo was following me. He walks with me all the way to my car and then I put the chair in the
trunk. We’re still talking about Vegas, the weather, the differences in culture here. We head back into the Club. I say hello to Gabriella’s parents who smile knowing smiles. Gabriella then blames her dad, claiming that he is the instigator for this whole incident. Carlo sits then gets up and goes to get a drink. I discuss with Gabriella. I am concerned because she didn’t seem to understand when I said that guys don’t usually want to be “just friends.” They usually wind up becoming quite possessive. And I remind her of the bocce boys from the previous night. She says I should date around and hang out with multiple guys. She will talk to them as well.

Matchmaking and the ways one goes about it are, according to various research participants, uniquely Italian American qualifications as well as talents. The curiosity regarding my personal life, as well as the discrepancy in dating criteria I often found between myself and participants also alluded to differences in social class. Mark Liechty’s analysis of the middle class in Kathmandu reflects action and intention. There are various actions verbs present such as “doing fashion” (256). Similarly, Italian Americans “do matchmaking” as a means to adhere to a symbolic idea, or requirements to be considered Italian. Also, these action verbs imply present tense, that people are in a constant state of creating and recreating the cultural class structure. Class categories are not static creations. There are various action verbs representative of middle class Italian Americans such as: “perform,” “become,” to “do matchmaking,” or to “do Italianness,” eating, gossiping and creating a hospitable atmosphere. All of these actions echo back to creating a cultural and classed space by third and fourth generation Italian Americans, that reflects the values or ideas encompassed within “to be Italian.” The remainder of this section shall be devoted to deconstructing the class elements contained within the dating arena, the criteria of potential suitors, and how class is “performed” throughout the art of matchmaking.

I notice that the guys Gabriella is trying to fix me up with are on the next court over and one of them, I think his name is [name], continues to look over quite obviously at me. I pretend not to notice and continue to walk back and forth up the court, following the
pallina’s migration. Eventually the blue team wins and I return the clipboard to [name of team captain] to sign off as our team captain. Then she passes it to the other team’s captain to do the same. We all shake hands and say “nice game” to each other. I let [name of team captain] know I won’t be here next week. Then I say goodbye and head over to Gabriella again, whose game is still in play. I notice [name] looking over once again. I bring my chair this time and settle in. We continue to talk about issues at the Club, her friend, her cousin coming to visit tomorrow, crime in Las Vegas, and the bocce boys. She begins to get mischievous and shouts out random names of the group of guys. I pray that they do not notice, but think that they must as most of the teams have gone home and it is no longer as noisy. There are only a few teams left on the court. We continue to discuss guys and Gabriella’s various theories on meeting guys. We talk about her friend [name], who Gabriella feels is entirely too picky. And then Gabriella tells me about another one of her friends, who has actually concocted a list of approximately 75 characteristics or “must haves” that any guy must possess before she’d agree to date him.

Gabriella wonders what the fourth member of the bocce boy group’s name is. She threatens to go over and talk to them. I make her promise not to. Instead she goes over to the scorekeeper on their team, looks at the team members’ names, then shouts back over his name, which I think was [name]. I can’t believe it. Then she heads back to her court. After shooting some more we see that their team has finished playing and is helping [name of matchmaker #2] pack up all of the bocce equipment. [Name of matchmaker #2] has from somewhere manifested two Lowe’s shopping carts to load everything in. The guys load the carts and then carry them over the rocks to the shed behind the Club, where everything is stored. We can’t help laughing at the sight.

Gabriella wanders over to [name of matchmaker #2]. He tells her that he “found” the carts on the property and thus considers them alright to use for this purpose. I can’t recall seeing a Lowe’s in the vicinity, but I could be wrong. When Gabriella returns she informs me that she has enlisted the aid of [name of matchmaker #2] in fixing me up with one of the bocce boys, who we think is named [name]. [Name of matchmaker #2] informs me that the young man is coming to watch me play bocce tomorrow and then he will meet me in the Club after for drinks. He says [name of young man] will bring one of his friends to meet [name of girl at the Club], the other girl that plays bocce tomorrow, who had asked him to fix her up with someone. I am slightly mortified. Despite my many protests, that I don’t have time to date, that I am a researcher etc. still Gabriella and her friends, even her dad, refuse to relent on their progress of finding me a date. I wonder about the ethics of it all, but then there is always such a fine line in these field situations. I feel that I have been there long enough that they no longer see me as strictly a researcher but as a person.

Matchmaking may be perceived as a mischievous game but it holds significance to research participants as a cultural pastime. Recall that, in chapter two, a research participant berated another research participant for not contributing to her matchmaking
schemes. “What kind of Italian are you?!” It seems that matchmaking provides a basis to enact culture, and also class, upon the stage that is the bocce courts. It is interesting to note as well, how it is an activity that many community members intentionally involve themselves in and there is always curiosity regarding who is dating whom. Matchmaking is representative, for third and fourth generation Italian Americans, as a way to enact culture and class:

_In between matches, when it is the other side’s turn to shoot, I make my way over to talk to Gabriella and her family. First I stop and greet [name] and his wife. I make arrangements to interview him later this week. Gabriella and her mom and nephew greet me when I run down to their court. They don’t mention any shenanigans that might have occurred since I have been absent, so I feel as though I am safe. They inquire as to what has happened to my legs, as I have a huge bruise on each calf. I explain to them, in graphic detail, that I had acquired the bruises when I was riding a moped at the ocean during my week away. They inform me that they have changed their minds about [name of man they tried to fix me up with]. Well, Gabriella’s mom has changed her mind and her nephew is enthusiastically recounting the event I missed, where [name of male friend] played the role of matchmaker and introduced him to a young woman at the Club last week. Gabriella still seems to like [the man they tried to fix me up with] even as I have tried to explain to her the vast differences between us, that would make any kind of relationship nearly impossible to maintain. Again, I tell her about the time I spent over an hour listening to him spill his life story to me, and also that he was quite candid about many things that I wish he was not candid about, certainly I felt as though it were a little inappropriate subject matter for someone he had just met. I hurry back over to my side of the bocce courts, as it is our side’s turn to start shooting. We end up finishing early. I bring my lawnchair and go back over to Gabriella’s court. She is on the one of the last courts on the end near the chain link and basketball courts. I settle back down and convince them to let me take some pictures. I snap some shots, while further explaining to Gabriella the situation with [name of man] and why I would be unable to date him. Then I make my way down to the other end of the court, where her father and husband are. I ask them if I could photograph them and they agree. I take some shots. Then [name of Gabriella’s male friend] makes his way over to me and begins quizzing me about [name of man] the guy I supposedly like. After I had found out that Gabriella did nothing to him over the past few weeks, I think, with relief, that I must be in the clear. I am wrong. Not only does [Gabriella’s male friend] make a huge commotion, yelling and looking over in [name of man]’s direction, yelling that I should just go talk to him and why was I making such a huge deal of it? Even though I was not doing anything, simply taking photographs and trying to diffuse the potentially embarrassing situation before it got out of hand. Gabriella’s friend informs her dad of something and he sneaks away to the other court ([name of man]’s court) before I have a chance to stop him. I wander back down to the other end of the court to discuss this with Gabriella. She runs over to
her dad though, who has now returned to fill her in on whatever has transpired. I keep trying to get her to tell me what had happened, what I should be prepared for, but she refuses. She then takes my wallet and hides it so that I cannot escape. She threatens to go for my car keys next. She then has to shoot the ball so she entrusts my wallet to her mother, who, still feeling bad for the debacle with [name of other man they tried to fix me up with] hands me back the wallet, much to Gabriella’s chagrin. “What kind of Italian are you?” she asks her mother. Apparently matchmaking is a prerequisite for being considered Italian. I try to escape, so Gabriella relents and lets me know a small bit of the conversation between her father and [name of man], only letting me know so much that her father had let him know I wanted to meet him and that he would come over after the game to be introduced by her father. Great, I can’t escape either. So I sit and wait for the inevitable. We talk a little about what’s happening at the Club. Apparently there’s a lot of drama and infighting. Gabriella informs me about what’s been happening and all of the different angles. I take some more pictures. Eventually the game ends and [name of man] appears behind me. He introduces himself, as Gabriella’s dad is still at the other end of the court and could not introduce him to me. I say hi and we make small talk. After he walks away, Gabriella analyzes the whole interaction, scolding me for not standing when introduced. I defend myself by saying it’s too informal and men are supposed to rise when introduced not the other way around. It is quite an informal setting, as we are all seated around in lawn chairs and the whole interaction lasted less than five minutes. Everyone is interested about this supposed “match.” Other bocce players come over to find out what has transpired. I take this as an opportunity to ask for interviews. Gabriella then further analyzes the interaction, claiming that he likes me and expressing the reasons why she believes this to be so. We all pack up and walk out. On the way to the car Gabriella and her nephew threaten to embarrass me if I do not call [name of man], after she had went through the trouble of getting his phone number. They continue to taunt me and Gabriella threatens to construct a large sign proclaiming that I love [name of man] and bring it next week if I don’t call him. I say I will, yet they continue to make motions out the car windows as I drive by and pass them on Sahara.

Again, the performance aspect of “doing matchmaking” is reflected throughout the excerpt. It is relatively simple to perceive the bocce courts as a stage upon which culture and class are enacted. It is also evident that this action, the art of matchmaking, is a community involvement. Notice also how community members not only want to play matchmaker, but also dole out advice as to what is proper behavior in the given situations. Gabriella felt that it was proper to stand when introduced to any new person. However, my own thought process regarding proper introductions differed. Also it is interesting to note the requirement in terms of dating criteria for potential suitors. There
were not any criteria regarding ethnic background, although due to the cultural terrain I
was often matched up with Italian American men. Most of these men had no specific
ethnic criteria; however, one of them specified a preference for an Italian girl and
 disagreed with the matchmakers that I appeared to be Italian. Despite this, he still
proceeded to talk to me so my ethnicity was not that much of a deterrent. During this
matchmaking experience I recalled my own mother’s stringent guidelines for potential
suitors and how much enjoyment she gets ripping up all men who do not live up to her
extremely high expectations. At the top of this list of criteria is always: “Is he educated?”
Educational capital is always the top tier requirement and most valued commodity. This
was somewhat in contrast to the guidelines for potential suitors that my matchmake rs
devised. They seemed to be most concerned with more practical aspects such as, does he
have a steady job and does he have a car. This demonstrates the difference in how class
is manifest in the dating arena. Diverse areas of the country present a reliance on
different class capital, depending on the markets presented. As I am from the Pacific
Northwest, and Seattle is ranked as one of the most educated cities in the country (Pryne
2006:1), it would stand to reason that my mother’s dating criteria would differ from the
dating criteria evident in Las Vegas, a location where one can make a comfortable living
without relying heavily upon higher education.

“Doing matchmaking” is an active process that entails an active process and
negotiation of classed identity. Class is reflected through cultural space and location. It
is fluid and is continuously restructured. However, class in connection to physical
attributes holds much less flexibility. The classed categories reflected in the physical
realm shall be addressed in the following section.
Class Manifest in the Physical Realm

Pierre Bourdieu (1984), in Distinction maintains that the body is a marked realm unto which others perceive social class. Subtle nuances of fashion, make up application, hairstyle etc. are all important in teasing out the classed hierarchy that is manifest within the physical realm. “The sign-bearing, sign-wearing body is also a producer of signs which are physically marked by the relationship to the body….” (1984:192). Upon the social stage, the body and its appearance are used to categorize and critique others. “The body, a social product which is the only tangible manifestation of ‘the person’, is commonly perceived as the most natural expression of innermost nature” (1984:192). The body is, in turn, a reflection of the social environment and its categorization strategies. “Thus one can begin to map out a universe of class bodies, which (biological accidents apart) tends to reproduce in its specific logic the universe of the social structure”(1984:193).

Foucault’s anatomo-politics are applicable to the class realm as well. As the body, the corporeal realm, is a map for which to determine one’s place in a classed hierarchy it stands to reason that classed physical attributes can also be defined in terms of anatomo-politics. The following data sets are taken from a larger class questionnaire which was modeled after Bourdieu’s class questionnaires in Distinction. My goal in inquiring about the physical manifestation of social class was to determine a) if participants believe there is an association between physical attributes and how someone is perceived in terms of social class and b) how participants perceive social class in the physical realm. In order to tie these questions into Italian American middle class I structured several different word associations often utilized by participants when
describing the classed category of the *guido* culture (largely teased hair, acrylic nails, gold jewelry). There are also several contrasts in the word associations (overalls, business suit etc). I also asked participants how they would physically describe someone of low and high class. I obtained this data from a pool of both Italian American and non Italian American participants in order to provide a viewpoint of different ethnic backgrounds to compare to Italian Americans. (Note: please refer to appendix 2 for the complete data sets).

In regard to the question of social class and social critique, all participants that provided an answer answered yes, that indeed physical attributes do influence how someone is perceived in the realm of social class. When asked what you can tell about a person by their physical appearance most participants provided an answer that associated physical appearance with other attributes (habits, self-worth, whether they have money or not, if they are friendly, if they are nice or sociable). This data provides evidence that people do associate physical appearance with opinions about others’ personalities or character and also, larger societal constructs.

In terms of how non-Italian Americans described someone of “low class” they often associated physical appearance (dirty clothes, poorly dressed, bad hygiene) with other characteristics (down and out, language is not good, broke, doesn’t speak well). In contrast those that appear to be “high class” are considered to be refined, intelligent, and to speak well, among other characteristics. This data demonstrates that the non-Italians that participated in the questionnaire associate class with physical appearance and, in turn, assumptions regarding a person’s intelligence and other characteristics. Those participants that identified as Italian (from Italy) and Italian American participants did not
seem to make an association between physical appearance and other characteristics. They all listed specific ideas regarding high and low class appearance, but these remained focused in the physical realm, rather than carrying over into other assumptions about the person. The participants that listed dual citizenship made a connection between other character or personality traits (careless about actions, not stiff, never talks down to people) based on a classed physical appearance. Those of mixed Italian ancestry were primarily focused upon classed descriptions in the physical realm. However, one respondent associated high class with “uppity-up Californians.”

In terms of physical categories the non-Italian Americans did not find any particular association with Italian Americans for the *guido* type categories (high heels, thigh high boots, acrylic nails, largely teased or permed hair, baggy jeans and gold jewelry). I derived these physical markers of *guido* culture from an initial conversation I had with several research participants, where they introduced me to the term *guido*. In general the non-Italian Americans expressed personal opinions regarding these categories (love to see, outdated, good) descriptions (tacky, uncomfortable) or relation to specific profession (stripper). There was no specific relation to ethnicity, although class was sometimes referenced (classy gold jewelry).

The mixed Italian American participants held similar viewpoints. They did not associate any of the *guido* physical descriptors with Italian Americans. Instead, they chose to express an opinion (trashy, yucky, tacky) or a persona or profession (hooker, hillbilly). Interesting to note is that both participants relate baggy jeans to a gang banger or gangster. Both participants are in their twenties so it stands to reason that they would make this association that the other older participants did not.
The Italian American participants did not provide any specific association between the *guido* physical descriptors and Italian Americans. Instead, they also expressed opinions (okay, disgusting, not good) or descriptions of occasions to wear each item (out on the town, fancy affair etc). Overall Italian Americans did not provide any association to a specific profession (businessman, hooker etc) as did other participants.

There was not too much difference between the descriptions provided by the Italians (born and raised in Italy). They also provided specific opinions (yes, classy, fake) or descriptors (young, farmer). There was not a recognized difference associated with a specific ethnic group, class or profession.

The Italian Americans who possessed dual citizenship (yet were born and raised in the United States) offered specific opinions (no, yes, don’t like) or advice for when to wear the clothing article (only for occasion). They did not recognized any association to a specific ethnic group. They did not associate the clothing articles or physical traits with class or a specific profession.

This cultural domain data suggests that Italians and non-Italians do recognize that people are judged and accorded social class by their physical appearance. Non-Italian participants were more likely to attribute a non-physical characteristic to physical appearance. Italian participants were more likely to describe a low or high classed individual without a connection to other defining characteristics. No participants made a link between the *guido* based word associations and Italian Americans. This suggested that the *guido* stereotype is not as prevalent, or is not immediately recognized. It is interesting to note, however, that the data assessed in the last section of this chapter supports the fact that Italian Americans do recognize the category of the *guido*. 
In December of 2009 an ethnic renaissance, if you could deem it that, began through the media with the premiere of Mtv’s *Jersey Shore*. This particular television show provided the rest of the country with a slice (albeit a carefully manufactured slice) of New Jersey, and Italian American culture, class and sense of style. The show focuses on the youth culture represented in the East Coast, and in particular *guido* style. This moniker is derived from the slang term *guido*, which was once used in a derogatory fashion, or as an outright ethnic slur against Italian Americans. However, the particular group of young people on the reality show, *Jersey Shore*, have chosen to align themselves with this often misused and misunderstood terminology and somehow consider it to be empowering. This term is, for these young people, a blazon representation of their own unique brand of youth culture, centered on flash, an in your face attitude, tanning, and skimpy fashion for women and for both genders a reliance on glitz, glam and particular fashion labels (Ed Hardy etc).

Perhaps most relevant to this study, regarding *Jersey Shore*, is the cast’s dependence on tanning. Several of the reality show participants view tanning as a religion and utilize it as a way to differentiate themselves from the mainstream White ethnic category. Nicole Polizzi, in a discussion on ethnic categories, explained that she refused to mark White and instead wrote in tan. Several other participants, such as Vinnie Guadagnino, lament that although of Sicilian heritage they are pale and need to tan. In a rather humorous rant, Nicole Polizzi voices her opinion on the tanning tax imposed by President Obama, which she takes as a personal offense. The cast mates of *Jersey Shore* have become pseudo celebrities. During the premiere weeks of season one
and two they graced the cover of nearly every celebrity gossip magazine, taking the place of actual actors and actresses.

Did *Jersey Shore* strike a disharmonious cord with Italian American viewers? Absolutely. As a consequence of the high profile of this television show, various Italian American ethnic organizations have voiced their opposition and demanded that *Mtv* pull the plug on *Jersey Shore*. Due to the cast mates frequent use of the term *guido* Senator Joseph F. Vitale, the chairman of the New Jersey Italian American Legislative Caucus and Richard Bilotti, the chairman of the New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission have pressured *Mtv* to cancel the show. They claim that the show is in opposition to New Jersey’s hate and bias crime laws (Hyman 2009: 1). Domino’s Pizza also pulled its advertising from *Mtv* due to the controversy. The reaction to the term *guido* has been likened to reaction to similar ethnic slurs used against other ethnic groups. The use, recognition and emotion behind the term *guido* garners further evidence that Italian Americans oppose the working class ethnic stereotype relative to the *Class Equals Culture Conundrum*. Also, it demonstrates that Italian Americans are still at a distance from mainstream White culture, as the particular ethnic brand of *guido* differentiates them into a minority group status.

The premiere of *Jersey Shore* encouraged the development of similar reality shows, in particular: the Style Network’s *Jerseyliscious* (2010, two seasons), Oxygen’s *Jersey Couture* (2010), as well as further interest in Bravo’s *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, which debuted in 2009 and entered its second season in 2010. All of these shows represent a slice, or elements of *guido* culture. All or a large majority of the reality show participants are distinctly of Italian descent. Ethnicity is largely overtly displayed and
these shows are the ultimate manifestation of the *Class Equals Culture Conundrum*. Though many of these shows represent an affluent lifestyle, they still also represent a “street style” or “gaudy/gavone look” that is, unfortunately, represented through the media as being synonymous with Italian American culture.

*The Real Housewives of New Jersey* builds upon *Bravo’s* successful *Housewives* franchise. The Jersey rendition of the show emphasizes East Coast, Italian American culture. Many of the participants focus on their role as dedicated housewives and proclaim that family is most important element in their lives. This subset of the *Housewives* franchise is, without dispute, the most drama filled. Constant verbal disagreements and shouting between the various constituencies on the show and even threat of physical altercations between women has caused the show to amass a number of outspoken critics. In addition, many of the participants play upon a mafia theme as several members have reputed mob connections. Perhaps most evident of highlighting a mafia theme is Caroline’s infamous quote, “Let me tell you something about my family…..” and it’s enduring implications. Also, another participant, Danielle, repeatedly refers to her security team and a group of male friends as “Danielle’s mafia.” Many of the participants are extremely wealthy and have acquired entrance into Jersey’s exclusive neighborhoods and country clubs yet they still portray themselves as “new money” by emphasizing their humble roots in the inner cities of New Jersey and also the fact that they were not born with silver spoons.

*Jersey Couture* and *Jerseylicious* are also shows set in New Jersey. The theme of family is also evident as these two shows are set in family owned and operated businesses. They operate within worlds (fashion and beauty) that are immersed within
the distinctive aesthetic niche of New Jersey. One of these businesses is a dress shop that caters to special events and the other is a hair, nail, makeup and tanning salon. Both of these promote the “Jersey look” and further propagate the guido or guidette stereotype associated with East Coast Italian American culture. In Jerseylicious a contrast is evident between the salon owners and the lead makeup artist against several of the young hairdressers and makeup artists. The younger employees continuously try to outdo each other with more outrageous outfits (especially of the figure displaying animal print variety), long acrylic nails and extremely teased hair. The owners repeatedly request a more subdued appearance, to which the girls claim they are Jersey girls and this is their unique style. The lead makeup artist again and again expresses her amazement and dismay at this style of dress, which she obviously considers low class because she continuously explains the vast difference between Jersey style and Manhattan style, to which she is more accustomed.

The first time I heard the term guido or guidette, a Club member explained to me that these are actual categories Back East. A guido was classified as a really good looking Italian male with the wife beater, gold chains and styled hair. A guidette was an Italian American female with long acrylic nails, big hair, tight clothes and usually wearing a crucifix. Guido and guidette are actual categories recognized by several of my research participants that have resided on the East Coast. Even within the Italian American community, the particular physical markers of these categories are evident, they are recognized, and they are a reality in the everyday lives of research participants. It is my intention, with the remainder of this chapter, discuss how Las Vegas Italian Americans relate to, or understand, the term or concept of the guido.
Overall, the Italian Americans I interviewed recognized the term *guido*, in particular if they had resided on the East Coast. Most of the Italian Americans I interviewed were middle aged and so it stands to reason that they might possess a different understanding of what a *guido* is in contrast to how this term is being utilized currently. Most Italian Americans found it to be a distinct category within the Italian American community, and most considered it an ethnic slur. Also interesting to note, however, is that there is a distinct physical description of the *guido*, as well. Constantino explains that the term *guido* may not be taken offensively from one Italian to another. He also details the physical stereotype of the *guido*:

*D:* I see, so I’ve heard like, speaking of stereotypes and what not, I’ve heard the term a *guido* and Italian Americans have explained to me the term of a *guido*.

*C:* *Guido,* what does that mean to you? What does that term?

*C:* You mean if you just call somebody *guido*? Well it’s *guido* just to me it’s like sort of saying Italian it’s uh I’m not gonna even say it’s necessarily derogatory but although it might be, it’s like going up to a Black guy and saying, calling him willy. Maybe you’re too young to even know that. You now I would take that as a derogatory it’s putting you a stereotype. If somebody called me, “hey *guido*” and they didn’t really know my name I would take that as they were being disrespectful to me. I know of a very professional racecar tuner does crew chief, his name is uh his name’s not Guido, but they call him *Guido* and everybody on the crew calls him *Guido* and it’s an affectionate thing, it’s a way of him getting recognition and they recognize that he’s obviously proud of his Italian heritage like this and they obviously recognize him by doing that. They do that in an
affectionate way. But to a stranger of course anybody other than Italian, an Italian wouldn’t call another Italian guido. You know if I don’t know your name I might say paisan. You know coming up to you, hey paisan do you know what time it is? You know you wouldn’t say guido you know what time it is? But a non-Italian to call you guido, yeah, it would be offensive actually.

D: So do you think that there is like any physical stereotypes associated with that term?

C: Guido? Oh just the fact that he must look Italian or somebody calls him guido, what does that mean? It goes back to what I was talking about kind of short you know maybe a little flamboyant, dark hair, maybe big nose.

Christian explains that there is a mafia association with the term guido:

D: Okay so I’ve heard some terms from people, just talking to Italian Americans, people that have lived back East and they’ve brought some different terms that I’ve never heard before and I just wanted to get your opinion on them, one of them is guido, do you know, like what does that mean?

C: That he’s Italian.

D: Okay, so it just means Italian.

C: Yeah that’s all.

D: It’s not derogatory?

C: No I don’t think so. Well unless that person was speaking in a derogatory way about an Italian, call him a guido, you know like he’s in the mob.

D: Okay so it’s associated with, it can be associated with

C: Can be

Isabella’s description of a guido is congruent with Christian’s:
D: So now I've heard a couple of terms just from people that have lived on the East Coast and I just wanted to run them by you and see if you've heard them and your opinion of them and how you would define them. So have you heard the term guido at all?

I: Guido?

D: Hmmm

I: Um I’ve heard that that’s like a slang or you know somebody that you want something done on the lark you know, that you would hire a guido to go take care of business or something like that.

Nico, Carla and Gabriella describe the specific physical traits of their conception of a guido:

D: Now I’ve heard a couple terms just from people that have lived Back East and wanted to see your opinions, and how you would define them- and one of them I’ve heard is guido?

N: Yeah guido.

G: Italian.

C: Yeah.

N: Usually yeah.

D: And is that offensive?

N: They mean it in a not in a nice way.

G: Would you take offense to it?

N: No cause I think it’s funny.

N: He ain’t gonna say it to my face.

C: (laughs)
N: You know.

C: But again, someone can say it behind your back.

N: You don’t walk.

C: Somebody could say “who’s that guido?”

N: You don’t walk up to somebody and say “guido” you know what I mean? If you don’t
know the guy you’re gonna get punched in the face.

D: Is there a stereotypical type, what a guido looks like or?

N: Guido is just a slang for

G: When I think guido I think big Italian guy, with like a sweatsuit and wife beater
hanging out and

N: Right yeah.

G: And the neck full of chains and they’re like “yeahhh” like that’s what I think of

Lenny took immediate offense to the use of the term guido:

D: So I’ve heard some terms from people that have grown up on the East Coast and I just
wanted to see if you’ve heard them and if so what do they mean to you. I’ve heard the
term guido from somebody that grew up in Queens like what does that mean?

S: (laughs) We need a video recorder for the face.

L: You’re going to get a mouthful. (Sighs) To me that’s a derogatory term. To me that’s
like calling an African American the N word, it’s the same thing with WOP, dago,
greaseball. But, like many other terms sometimes it was, I talked to a woman the other
day and she says that’s how we refer to ourselves because she was from I think she said
she was from New Jersey she referred to her group of people as guidos, I think it was
Italians but to us that was very derogatory. I’ve heard it all.
Filipo also found the term *guido* to be offensive:

*D*: Have you heard, now these are some terms that I’ve heard from people that have resided on the East Coast and I just wanted to ask you if you’ve heard of them and if so, how would you define them? Or what’s your opinion of the term. So I’ve heard people reference the term *guido* what is your opinion about the term?

*F*: I think *guido* is a condescending remark.

*D*: And so it’s basically just an ethnic slur to use against Italians?

*F*: Yes. Unless it’s of course me, because I know guidos.

It is apparent that there is a fission between how Las Vegas Italian Americans understand the term *guido* and how it is currently being utilized in popular culture. Reality shows, such as *Jersey Shore*, have brought this construct of the *guido* into the homes of people who may not encounter Italian Americans on a regular basis. Some Italian Americans feel that this television show, and others like it, are discriminatory and present them in a bad light. Thus this portrayal of Italian Americans has come under heavy fire from various ethnic organizations around the country. In the promos for *Jersey Shore* the term *guido* was used quite liberally. However, after the hailstorm of controversy the commercials advertising *Jersey Shore* were re-aired without the offensive term. Overall, the concept of the *guido* supports the continuation of the *Class Equals Culture Conundrum* and the portrayal of Italian Americans as not quite White. These portrayals of Italian Americans situate them into a static working class category that is directly tied to the conception of Italian American culture. Yet, for whatever reason, it is still considered advantageous to market Italian American culture in such a reductionist fashion.
This conception of Italian Americans presents a distancing from the mainstream White culture. Interesting to note is how this coincides with Salvatore’s views on Italian Americans’ self construct:

D: So, in your opinion are Italian Americans White? Like the category in this country?
S: I would have to say yes. They don’t like to admit that but yes, they are.
D: Now why do you say that they don’t like to admit that?
S: Because they like to be separated from themselves in their own identity but if you go in to fill out a job application or some type of government form and you have to identify what you are they, I’ve known some people that actually write in the word like and I’m like “oh that’s crazy” I said “you’re White” Caucasian, you know, there’s no place to write Italian in here so and it’s kind of funny but that’s because of, that’s a part of their culture they feel like they are separated as separate culture from other people. I find that to be rather arrogant to tell you the truth.

In the following chapter I shall address Whiteness in relation to Italian Americans’ identity and how they either move with or against the mainstream American notion of White culture.
CONCLUSION

MEDDIGANS, MAINTAINING ETHNICITY AND MAKING IDENTITY: HOW ITALIAN AMERICAN ETHNIC IDENTITY IS REFLECTED AND EXERCISED

It was on a midsummer day in 2009 when I learned about the term meddigan (also closely related to the term ‘merican). Having been born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, and in an area largely divorced from East Coast Italian American culture, I was completely unaware of the existence and use of this term. While partaking in an interview for my thesis work, Salvatore, a middle aged Italian American, began to describe the recognizable differences encased within the category of Italian American. He sat there in Starbucks, wearing his customary Kangol newsboy cap, polo shirt, shorts and brown leather loafers, speaking in a heavy Brooklyn accent. I had caught him unawares, mid-sentence with my ignorance. I had asked him about differences within the Italian American community, to which he replied, “Usually the term is called meddigan and that’s a non-Italian White person which is usually Anglo-or Anglo-Saxon which is predominantly English, Irish, German or any of those that is not related or in the Italian culture. That’s how that’s defined. They even use it with their own people, Americanized Italians are also called meddigans because that’s basically somebody that’s forgotten their culture and they act like typical, for lack of a better term, the yuppified version of their own ethnicity.” These themes of selling out, assimilation and challenges to maintaining “authentic” culture are often echoed throughout my interviews with Las Vegas Italian Americans. Although these views are often expressed, and contrary to Richard Alba’s (1985) concept of fading ethnicity I have found that there is a
The concepts of the *meddigan* and the hyphenated American resonate deeply within the consciousness of Italian Americans. Although most modern theoreticians would assert that by the third and fourth generations they have become entirely American, that they have arrived securely and without contestation in the middle class, they are still distinguishable within the ethnic tapestry of America. It is my intention, in concluding this thesis, to articulate the differences still inherent within and amongst this ethnic group and in doing so articulate the ramifications of utilizing terms such as White and Caucasian as a means to identify or label the European population in America.

As discussed throughout this thesis, Italian Americans have occupied a niche “in between” degrees of Whiteness ever since their arrival in the United States. At first they were categorized as “Dark Others” but since have transitioned and are now, without much dispute in terms of the census categories, included into the mainstream White ethnic bracket. However, as a consequence of identifying within the White sphere of identity, differentiation within this blanketing category is often suppressed. Whiteness, in both theory and popular consciousness, often denotes a non-ethnic status. In contrast to this belief, Italian Americans are still very much ethnic, in that the fact that they maintain cultural traditions, beliefs and conceptions of identity that counter act the whitening effect of being labeled White.

The terms *meddigan* and *guido* offer insight into the various categories of Italian American and how Italian Americans define themselves. These two terms are on opposite ends of the ethnic spectrum. A *guido*, as discussed in the previous chapter, is...
often viewed as derogatory or an ethnic slur. There is a bevy of negative stereotypes that surround this term. *Guido* and *guidette* are directly associated with the *Class Equals Culture Conundrum*, in that they position Italian Americans into the category of the working class ethnic. *Meddigan* however, situates Italian Americans, or others that are labeled White, into the assimilated, middle class, mainstream Anglo culture. *Meddigan* may also be considered a term intended to insult, if one considers being labeled White, or American as synonymous with selling out on one’s own culture. This term also implies an existence of those who are not White, in accordance to the standards set forth by the census, or those who move against this category. As discussed in the introduction, the census categories of White and Caucasian and the *Class Equals Culture Conundrum* stand at opposing ends of a spectrum of structural influence yet both present a form of bio-politics. While the census categories promote a mass White identity, the *Class Equals Culture Conundrum* still designates Italian Americans a status of “Other” or defines Italian Americans as “not quite White.” These terms *meddigan* and *guido* echo the divide between these two opposing ideologies.

These terms also illustrate how locale within the United States contributes to a sense of ethnic identity, as well. I have found that generally those raised on the East Coast or other areas with high concentrations of Italian Americans immediately recognize and define these terms, while those raised in areas not heavily concentrated with Italian Americans were not as likely to recognize these terms or categories. Constantino, who was born and raised Back East explains the concept of the *guido*: (note: some of this data was referenced in chapter four, however here I am utilizing it to emphasize a different point).
D: Guido, what does that mean to you? What does that term?

Ag: You mean if you just call somebody guido? Well it’s guido just to me it’s like sort of saying Italian it’s uh I’m not gonna even say it’s necessarily derogatory but although it might be, it’s like going up to a Black guy and saying, calling him willy. Maybe you’re too young to even know that. You now I would take that as a derogatory it’s putting you a stereotype. If somebody called me, “hey guido” and they didn’t really know my name I would take that as as they were being disrespectful to me. I know of a very professional racecar tuner does crew chief, his name is uh his name’s not Guido, but they call him Guido and everybody on the crew calls him Guido and it’s an affectionate thing, it’s a way of him getting recognition and they recognize that he’s obviously proud of his Italian heritage like this and they obviously recognize him by doing that. They do that in an affectionate way. But to a stranger of course anybody other than Italian, an Italian wouldn’t call another Italian guido. You know if I don’t know your name I might say paisan. You know coming up to you, hey paisan do you know what time it is? You know you wouldn’t say guido you know what time it is? But a non – Italian to call you guido, yeah, it would be offensive actually.

D: So do you think that there is like any physical stereotypes associated with that term?

Ag: Guido? Oh just the fact that he must look Italian or somebody calls him guido, what does that mean? It goes back to what I was talking about kind of short you know maybe a little flamboyant, dark hair, maybe big nose.

Notice that there is a specific “ethnic” stereotype that is associated with a guido, according to Constantino. This stereotype is a form of anatomo-politics and follows
several of the stereotypes discussed in chapter four. The *guido* stereotype promotes a non-White status for Italian Americans.

Tom and Rachel had a difficult time providing me with an explanation of the term *guido* as well as the term *meddigan*, as both were raised in areas without large concentrations of Italian Americans:

*D:* Okay so I’ve heard some terms that were used by people Back East and I’m just trying to understand like definitions of them and what not, I’ve heard the term *guido*, so what in your opinion does that mean?

*T:* Guido?

*D:* Guido like

*T:* Guido?

*R:* G-U-I-D-O Guido. I’ve heard that too, but that’s gotta be from Back East.

*T:* One time I heard that Guido was wasn’t one in the Godfather named Guido?

*R:* I don’t know.

*T:* Yeah the one that was getting in trouble, old guy?

*R:* I don’t know I thought it was different I thought it was kind of

*T:* Like a name, I don’t know what it is.

*R:* Yeah, I don’t know.

*D:* Okay what about the term *meddigan*?

*R:* Meddigan? M-E-D? I don’t know that one either.

This excerpt demonstrates the diversity that exists within the ethnic category of Italian American. Some Italian Americans recognize the terms and all of the associated implications, while others remain unaware.
In contrast to Rachel and Tom Christian, who was raised on the East Coast, provided me with a complete description of the term *meddigan*:

_D:_ Okay what about the term, *meddigan*?

_C:_ Meddigan? It’s American it’s what I call my wife, really in a kidding way, what do you know honey you’re a meddigan, you don’t know what Italians do.

_D:_ Okay.

_C:_ Meddigan, how is it spelled?

_D:_ I’m guessing.

_C:_ Medican? K-a-n

_C:_ That’s Italian for being American, it’s a slang term.

_D:_ Okay so it’s not derogatory or anything either, it’s just?

_C:_ I don’t think so.

Not only does Christian recognize the term, he also attributes it to a lack of Italian status. He teasingly refers to his non-Italian wife as a *meddigan*, letting her know that she “doesn’t know what Italians do.” This is an illustration of the divide present, not only within the Italian community, but that there is a recognition of the differences in culture between Italians and other White ethnic groups.

Similar to Christian Isabella, who was born and raised in Southern Italy and also lived as a young woman on the West Coast, recognized the term:

_D:_ And what about a meddigan, medican?

_I:_ Can you tell me? American.

_D:_ Short for that, but the way that they say meddigan, medican?
I: Well that would be a little slam that you know, they’re American they’re people from the U.S. and they really don’t know what they’re talking about. That’s my take on what they’re saying they’re saying that.

Again, Isabella provides a demonstration through her definition of this term, that there is a divide between “authentic” Italians and Americans. The fact that she was born and raised in Italy herself also is important in how she defines the term. “They’re people from the U.S….they don’t know what they’re talking about,” in this case she may be referencing Italian Americans from an Italian immigrant’s point of view. She also recognizes that it is an insult to be called a meddigan.

There also was a difference of opinion in regard to whether this term is insulting or not. Some Italian Americans, such as Lenny, took immediate offense to the term. However, he was unable to provide me with a concrete description of the term meddigan:

D: Have you heard the term meddigan? Medican’ meddigan

L: I think it’s still offensive, sorry.

D: Meddigan?

L: Yeah.

D: And what does it mean? If you could define it.

L: It’s….I can’t really define it, it’s hard to. I know what you’re saying but I can’t define it. I can’t think of a way to define it.

D: It’s that bad?

L: Yeah.

D: I noticed that some Italian Americans say like “oh he’s a meddigan” so that’s like insulting?
L: (nods)

D: Okay? Does it mean Italian?

L: It’s a derogatory name for somebody that’s

D: Does it mean not authentic or something or not

L: Yeah, yeah. I just I can’t think there’s people sitting here that are better with words

than I am. Yeah that’s the best that I can do, I’m sorry.

Adriana found other ethnic slurs used against Italian Americans to be much more

offensive than the term meddigan:

D: Um one was like and I don’t know if I’m pronouncing this correctly but meddigan?

A: Oh a meddigan that means he’s an American. A meddigan is just a way of saying an

American, meddigan.

D: Oh okay so do you think that’s derogatory?

A: No I think what’s derogatory is WOP and Dago

D: Okay.

A: And you know the story about WOP right?

D: Was that the one of them, was it without papers?

A: Without papers yeah and really they hung that sign WOP on everyone whether you

were German when you came over and but the majority of the people without papers

were Italians so the term WOP that’s how we got coined that.

D: Okay and what is

A: Dago? Dago is a slang term for Italian yeah. It’s kinda like a Kraut for German okay

it’s kinda like the same thing, it’s very derogatory.
Adriana did not consider being labeled a *meddigan* insulting. She found the terms that divide Italian Americans from the White majority and accord them a minority status to be much more insulting. It is interesting to note that Adriana was not raised Back East and her viewpoints reflect that it is not necessarily negative to be considered American or White.

The term *meddigan* provides much insight into the diversity that is encompassed within the category of Italian American. First, it is an ethnic term recognized by not all Italian Americans. The fact that this term is recognized and utilized by some Italian Americans and not others, depending on where they grew up, demonstrates that there is great diversity within the category of Italian American. Some were exposed to this term and the cultural implications that surround it, while others were not. Several participants refer to the term *meddigan* as defining an Italian American who acts American, or they used to define an American. This demonstrates the diversity that exists within the White ethnic category. Italian Americans are categorized by the census and other such entities as White, however they recognize a distinction between themselves and other Americans that are also lumped into the standardized category of White or Caucasian.

**Categorization Revisited: An Entrenched Source of Power**

In this concluding chapter I shall present a depiction of modern White ethnics and address their answer to the questions: where are we and what have we become? A common theme reverberates back in answer to these questions and that is the longing to reconnect with the past. Though most Italian Americans interviewed do agree that the past, the ideal of ethnicity is now in existence largely through memory, they are still striving to maintain a stronghold on this culture. Though Richard Alba (1985) asserts
that we are now in the “twilight of ethnicity” and that the ethnic differences are there but are very faint, I have found that there are still resilient components of ethnic demarcation that exist and Italian Americans have not yet relinquished their hold on their culture.

The melting pot theory was a popular theory espoused during the twentieth century. The focus was on structural assimilation and that everyone would eventually “melt” together, rendering individual cultural awareness and uniqueness as obsolete. Alba traces the origins and transitions of the concept of assimilation, the driving force behind this view of the “melting pot.” Assimilation, and assimilation theory have gone through numerous transitions and have came and went in popularity in the academic and popular cultural realms. Although the concept of assimilation is not quite straightforward, as there are many renditions of this concept proposed by social theorists, Alba presents the concept of “modified assimilation,” focusing the pivotal aspect of assimilation at the structural level. In this view, it is the structures (economic, social etc.) within society that initiate the push and pull nature of assimilation. A number of social theorists maintain that the concept of White ethnicity is itself a dying concept and will also soon become an antiquated notion. “The Italian has acculturated rapidly and the process is usually complete by the first generation” (Gallo 1974:113). Erik Amfitheatrof summarizes the process of identity transition through the immigration experience:

The children of the Italian immigrants no longer feel Italian. They are American. In shedding a sense of apartness from American life, they have also relinquished their once powerful emotional associations with a remote Italian world that they know secondhand, from family recollections and legends. A void has been created, and they are now beginning to reevaluate their ethnic past, which is Italian American rather than Italian, because it is an escapable part of what they think about themselves and what they tell their children. [Cordasco 1974:viii]
According to Richard Alba: “Despite the image in the American consciousness of an intense, family-centered Italian American culture, the group’s cultural distinctiveness has paled to a feeble version of its former self. Paralleling this change, the social boundary between Italians and other Americans has become easily permeable…” (1985:159). Alba predicts that after the fourth generation ethnic distinctiveness will become even less recognizable (1985:160).

The focus on structure as a motivating factor for assimilation provides support that the census categories, a regulated body of definition espoused by a structural entity, promote the same pathway to assimilation. Benedict Anderson (1991) claims that the census is an institution of power whose objective was to promote a sense of nationalism, of togetherness (163). Ethnic categories are a structural form of regulation and in their reductionism, they promote a sense of oneness, of a national White identity. However, this constructed and assigned identity obscures much of the diversity that exists within the narrowly confined and defined ethnic bracket of White or Caucasian. Foucault’s description of institutions of power further details the structural association between the census categories, power and assimilation:

If the development of the great instruments of the state, as institutions of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomo- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth century as techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family and army, schools and the police, individuals, medicine and the administration of collective bodies), operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces working to sustain them. They also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony. [1978:141]

The promotion of a singular White identity is a form of regulation by biopower.

This categorization feeds into the national obsession with physical appearance and
“race.” Physical indicators of status, such as skin color, only further the divide of inequality that is present. The act of defining in conjunction to physical attributes is simplistic, yet it is often the first source of definition one utilizes. My research with Italian Americans demonstrate that not only is there immense cultural diversity that exists within the category of White, but also physical diversity. The divide between the Northern and Southern Italian culture that is manifest physically provides support that being perceived as White, as being American, does not sum up a concrete, static form of ethnicity.

Richard Alba presents a “conjunction of forces” that have lead to the assimilation of Italian Americans which includes: occupational structural assimilation, the exodus to the suburbs and the transition to the second and third generations (1985:viii). It is precisely all of these factors that occurred in a relatively short span of time, and their connectedness that have led to the muted forms of ethnicity observed today, according to Alba. He claims that it was the structural mobility that caused a transformation in the occupational structure (1985:81) which led to assimilation. In the mid twentieth century there was a shift from agricultural/blue collar professions, to much more availability of white collar work (1985:81). This forged a further separation between the former constructions of identity and those of the succeeding generations.’ He outlines factors such as generation and geography that determine (or influence) rates of assimilation. He stresses rates of intermarriage as the most determining factor.

In regard to location, the suburbs are an ideal representation of transitioning into mainstream Anglo-American culture. Alba asserts that it is precisely this structural influence (political economy/economic opportunity) and the move to the suburbs that
swept Italian Americans into mainstream Anglo culture. Salvatore La Gumina (1988) argues conversely that suburbanization was not associated with the complete burring of ethnic lines. LaGumina contends that this does not allow any consideration of ethnic identity, reality, presence or prevalence in the suburbs (1988:3). It is apparent that his argument supports that the “whitening” of Italian Americans was not an all inclusive or finite process once the exodus to suburbia was achieved. “To recognize ethnicity as a persistent force in suburbia might serve as an antidote to more stereotypical views advanced by sociologists who stressed the conformist middle class preoccupation of life bereft of a true sense of culture and mired in monotony and mediocrity” (1988:4).

La Gumina argues that there has been a bias in studies regarding Italian Americans. This bias maintains the assumption that all Italian Americans were urban dwellers and that the culture demonstrated in large urban areas was applicable to all Italian Americans, which rendered those residing in the suburbs, virtually invisible. LaGumina’s study reflects the need to examine each culture in its own environmental niche. He maintains that Italian Americans must be examined in the suburbs and the processes of assimilation and acculturation must be considered independently in this locale, not in conjunction to factors and situations presented to Italian American urban communities (1988:3). My research demonstrates that the exodus to the suburbs has not caused Italian Americans to lose their distinctiveness. Suburbia, or American culture in the West, may promote an Italian American identity of the meddigan, however Italian Americans still maintain a distinctive cultural niche.

Richard Alba’s (1985) work is often used for the basis of comparison when presenting an argument for the assimilation of White ethnics, in particular for the
assimilation of Italian Americans. This end of the spectrum assumes that White ethnicity is in the “twilight” and since the time of its publication (1985) should have, by now twenty-five years later, nearly faded out. However assimilation is a much more complex concept, and there is actually a spectrum that is presented, by Italian Americans, and how and when aspects of assimilation manifest are determined by context, and at times, personal will. Micaela di Leonardo (1984) presents the idea of a spectrum of ideology surrounding assimilation, pitting the melting pot theory at the end closest to full assimilation and, at the other end the ethnic renaissance point of view (165). Gerd Baumann’s study (1996) regarding the dominant and demotic, or alternate discourse, is applicable to obtaining an understanding of the spectrum of assimilation as well. The dominant discourse in this country is one of assimilation, it situates Italian Americans within the melting pot framework. Italian Americans are encouraged to identify, or label themselves, as White or Caucasian on many state generated forms and documents, such as the United States Census. However, there is an alternate discourse present as well, one of an ethnic renaissance, and Italian Americans exercise agency in determining how to label themselves and how and when to activate elements of an ethnic identity.

With the remainder of this chapter I shall explore the various factors that create boundaries and differences amongst Italian Americans as well as between Italian Americans and White ethnic groups, such as White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. There are a bevy of different factors that contribute to the diversity that exists within the category of those that identify as Italian American. In addition, I shall address how Italian Americans recognize Whiteness and an inclusion into this category. I shall also examine the concept of invisible White privilege, and how it relates to Italian Americans.
Consequences of Categorization: Invisible White Privilege

Ian Haney Lopez (2006) asserts that White as a category is fluid and in constant flux. It is continuously changing, it is socially constructed and subject to specific context (place, time period, activity). Whiteness manifests according to specific prerequisites and conditions. Definitions of Whiteness are forced upon the populace by an intricate web of influence that spans well beyond the scope of agency. Yet, at the same time there is room to exercise agency within the category if one is perceived to fit within this category of privilege.

The categories of White or Caucasian promote an invisible privilege. This privilege is a reflection of the position of power that is accorded to those deemed White becoming naturalized. Whiteness, and all of the advantages provided by this status, are taken for granted because they are so embedded within the consciousness of being labeled White. Sylvia Yanagisako (1995) maintains that one must look across boundaries and domains in order to recognize power and its consequence, which is cultural domains and these only appear to be natural (11).

Whiteness as an identity is shifting, at times invisible, and taken for granted. White equates to being unmarked, the ability to fluidly transition through society without many of the obstacles imposed by “color.” But is this a limited view of a White identity? And how do Italian Americans in Las Vegas move within or against this category? My data suggests that Las Vegas Italian Americans recognize or associate White or Caucasian with privilege. Most of the Italian Americans I interviewed do often cite themselves as White or include themselves within the category of Caucasian or White, most with the understanding that it is not necessarily a personal choice in doing so, but
rather a lack of choice or lack of provided options. Most expressed some discomfort or
hesitancy when discussing Whiteness or the privilege that this position provides.
However, most ready to outwardly admit that being included in this category definitely
provided them an outright advantage:

D: So what does it mean to be White or Caucasian to you? To be included into that, or if
you feel you identify with that category, what does it mean to be in that category?
A: I never really thought about it except I was always just glad that I was born who I am.
I guess it’s just like I’m glad that my name is Adriana because it’s not a name that you
hear often. I’m glad that I was born White and Italian but I guess if I was born anything
other I would be just as proud but it really I really haven’t really thought too much about
that.

D: So what do you think it means to be White? That category?
A: It means that maybe I have some a step up maybe from another background maybe
that I had more opportunities maybe.

This excerpt is not unique in that the participant, Adriana, references both the privilege
and opportunities her status granted her, but it is as though it is a secondary thought,
something that was never at the forefront of consideration for her. Also, notice the
uncertain language, maybe I had more opportunities, maybe. Many theorists such as
Peggy McKintosh (1988) assert that Whiteness, and being included within this category,
are privileges that are often taken for granted or easily dismissed by those that have
possessed admittance or acceptance within this realm of privilege. Thomas A. Guglielmo
(2003) argues against the pervasive ideology that Italian Americans and other white
ethnics have pulled themselves up by the bootstraps in a new country and why can’t other
ethnic groups do so? He contends that Italians were granted a privilege upon arrival that these other ethnic groups could never possess: being characterized as White. He traces the history of Italian immigration as well as the history of racializing peoples in America. His argument is centered on the fact that Italians did not face institutional racism: they were not restricted in terms of housing, marriage, employment—many of the limitations that other ethnic groups faced—because of their categorization as White. However, they were subjected to racial discrimination, though they were not outright barred from many of these structures (legally or on paper). They were still discriminated against and faced violence and prejudicial stereotypical caricatures of themselves, specifically those of Southern Italian heritage. Guglielmo also distinguishes between color and race. While Italians did not need to become White, they always were, they were still subject to racial discrimination. While Italians were classified as White, they often faced violence due to their racial categorization. However, Americans were less apt to classify them as “colored” or any category outside of White because of their association to Europe and European history, art etc. If Americans indeed classified Italians as non-White, then what did that say for their own civilization, their own place in the constructed hierarchy? It would imply a proximity to darkness they would refuse to acknowledge. Guglielmo argues that Italians’ Whiteness was never challenged and this fact needs to be recognized, especially when “bootstrap” stories are being exchanged. Guglielmo’s assessment of the racial classification of Italian Americans highlights importance of positionality.

The census categories of White/Caucasian demonstrate an assimilationist agenda. Whiteness is dynamic, yet these categories amalgamate a large majority of the population into a singular ethnic bracket. This both obscures power dimensions as well as takes
away from individual agency, as it diminishes the ability to assert one’s ethnic identity. The ethnic categories of White and Caucasian promote separateness in terms of power yet lack degrees of difference in terms of determining ethnic identity. Identifying as White or Caucasian facilitates the continuation of an invisible White privilege. Judith Martin, Robert Krizek, Thomas Nakayama and Lisa Bradford (1999) in their article *What do White people want to be called*? assert that White people’s position of privilege is the reason for their invisibility in regard to ethnic labeling. This privilege is invisible itself, as well. They assert that ethnic categories are not static but “processes that change and evolve over time,” (29). This entails an intricate degree of negotiation. The authors recognize that those labeled white are neutrally positioned, yet they can choose to become ethnic such as “German-American.” There are various power relations involved regarding this negotiation process.

Italian Americans demonstrate that they engage and disengage with the concept of Caucasian or White. It is an imposed category that does not reflect the actual identification of their ethnic identity. However this status of White, this advantageous status is also, at times, taken as a given, an invisible privilege. Christian answer to “what does it mean to be White or Caucasian?” demonstrates this invisible privilege:

*D:* What does it mean to be white or Caucasian to you? To be included into that category in America?

*C:* I never really thought of it, Danielle. I never really thought of it.

*D:* Really?

*C:* Have you?
D: I have just because just because people always ask me what my ethnic background is and people always wonder so I don’t really, I always have to tell people.

C: I don’t know how to answer that, I don’t know. Compare White well, compared to being Black?

D: Or just in general, what do you think it means if somebody’s included into that category? Not necessarily you but just people?

C: I consider myself Italian, very glad that I’m Italian. Because compared to everybody else, I’m sure they’re glad they’re Mexican, they’re Portuguese, they’re English or German I’m sure they’re happy that they’re that too, but I know I’m glad I’m Italian. But about the color I don’t know.

D: So you consider yourself to be White then?

C: Certainly.

Constantino is ambivalent regarding the racial categories provided by the census. He accepts the categories provided and does not view it as a problem to define himself as White:

D: So on like the census applications, what ethnic box do you check, you know they have all the different boxes?

C: Well certainly male, the other one would be Caucasian. They never ask you if you’re Italian. They ask you if you’re uh Caucasian, maybe Hispanic, African American, or Other. Asian or something like that.

D: So you don’t use the other box ever?

C: No.
D: So what do you think about those large ethnic categories? Like lumping everybody in to saying white or Hispanic, what do you think like also there’s a lot of diversity, or do you think they’re a true form of identity?

C: Yeah I think they’re, I see nothing wrong with it. If I was Asian, I have no problem checking the box to say that I’m Asian, if I’m Hispanic or White or anything yeah

D: So you don’t think they’re too broad or something like that?

C: Do I think it should say Caucasian versus European?

D: Yeah or like maybe if they have an optional for all the different ethnic groups if they let you.

C: I think it would be fine, I think it would be fine if it was more detailed than that, more specific I mean than uh just Asian, Hispanic, Black or White. Yeah I think it would be fine, I have no problem with that at all.

D: Do you think it would be better than the way it is now?

C: I honestly don’t know one way or another, I’ve never thought about it and just quick answer off the top of my head, I don’t know where it would make a difference one way or another, good or bad. Something different about it, you know.

Isabella acknowledges that the United States is still plagued by racial discrimination, yet she does not feel any benefit or privilege at being labeled Caucasian or White:

D: Okay so what does it mean to be White or Caucasian, and using those terms in the American ideology surrounding those terms or American categories of White or Caucasian?

I: Well I think it’s a census thing (laughs) I mean it’s kind of sad that we all have to be categorized in something but it is something that needs, I guess, to be done. However, is
there a benefit of being Caucasian versus being African American I don’t think so. I think that actually if you’re a Caucasian these days, you don’t fare as well in my opinion. You know but again, it’s all about what you want to be, it’s all about your dedication, it’s all about struggling to become somebody, whether you are fair skinned, dark skinned, it doesn’t make any difference in the U.S. at least in what I have experienced, you are able to strive to succeed, it’s again, like I stated before we you know totally racially free of discrimination? Probably not but I haven’t experienced that first hand.

However some Italian Americans, such as Constantino, recognize that being included into the category of White has its definite privileges. He relates these privileges to a sense of security, of being included into the majority category:

D: That’s what it means to be White or Caucasian, to be able to be included into that category it’s like the feeling of security or

C: Well to me yeah I would categorize the person as being part of the majority and you could sub classify that as to what does that mean and that means maybe some type of security and you know and the downside of that is, depending on your political beliefs and things like that you know you talk about the immigration or you know to me one of the problems with the immigration issues is that we made immigration laws on the books for I don’t know, a hundred years, a couple hundred years or more and that seemed to work for a long long time, where as people like my grandparents that came here had to go through the real channels and the real proper ways to become citizens and learn the language and that kind of stuff like this. But when you see as many illegals that are taking up the resources of our country and eventually can dictate policy to me it means that the security of our nation could be less independent. In the sense that I’ve always
known it to be in the history books that they could eventually open the borders completely
and then Mexico, South America and America could all be one country and I don’t see
that as a benefit, and why is that? Because our system of government and democracy
and the capitalist country that we’ve always been since day one, has given us benefits
that I believe are superior to these other governments so that’s a short version of a very
complex issue but that has to do with the majority and the minority and the security.

Bio-politics is defined as a series of intervention and regulatory controls (Foucault
1978:139). Various forms of administration of collective bodies are institutions of power,
according to Foucault (1978:141). The ultimate goal of biopower, according to Foucault,
is the regulation of the population through various social controls (1978:147).
Constantino’s excerpt provides a clear example of the regulation of the population
through ethnic labeling and larger bureaucratic structures, such as immigration controls.
The population is regulated through this labeling process, as there is a minority and
majority group. The census functions as a large administrative body that continues to
reinforce the racial ideology that promotes a divide into a minority and majority group.

Although some Italian Americans express ambivalence in regard to their
advantageous position in society while others, such as Rachel, equate a White status with
an ingrained sense of power:

D: What does it mean, in your opinion, to be White or Caucasian in America?

R: Well I think we have certainly an advantage.

D: Okay.

R: In America, I don’t know if we would if we went to another country (laughs) but I
think we do.
Similarly, Nico, Carla and Gabriella situate a White status with financial opportunity. They also recognize that there are differences within this category of Whiteness and that not all White people are provided with the same opportunities. There are various segments of the White population and various markers of differentiation, primarily economic differentiation:

D: So what, and again we kind of already touched on this, what does it mean to be White or Caucasian in that larger sense, that larger category in America, what do you think it means to be considered that?

N: Oh, more money, more money.

D: Okay.

G: Smarter.

N: I wouldn’t say smarter.

G: Well I think more people would think that.

C: That’s how you feel.

N: I don’t know, I just think it’s your opportunities though.

C: That’s what I said.

G: I don’t think that but I think that generally people would think that white skinned people have more education, make more money, they are smarter.

N: Right.

C: More opportunities.

N: More opportunity to make money. If you’re born, if you’re born in a slum you’re gonna, usually, sounds sad but you’re gonna die in a slum because you don’t have those opportunities.
C: Right.

N: To go on you know and better yourself. Very few break out and go on it’s rare.

G: It’s hard to break that cycle.

N: Yeah. Usually if you’re White like Mrs. Cleaver, and usually more you know, dad wears jacket at dinner you know that kind of general crap.

C: Well what did you wear at dinner?

G: Dago T (laughs)

N: Dago t-shirt and that was it, jeans.

C: And your napkin.

N: And that was it, and my napkin.

D: Okay so you think that like concept of the American dream isn’t really real for some, for a lot of people

N: No it’s not.

C: They just don’t know it.

N: Well I mean, if you’re poor you’re poor.

C: Don’t you think? I really see that, I’m just being honest, everybody has to have dreams every culture has that dream of coming to America and they think of our, we’re paved in gold, and they literally believe that.

G: Yeah.

N: My dad thought that, he says he told me he thought that it was really paved in gold and then you find out there’s no such thing as a free lunch, you know.

C: And money doesn’t grow on trees.

N: Right.
The viewpoints expressed by Nico, Carla and Gabriella are similar to John Hartigan’s (1997) study of White Detroit. John Hartigan explores the boundaries between Whiteness and White domains. He claims that the gaps in between these domains are irregular and unpredictable. Hartigan stresses context as supremely relevant in determining identity. He studied three different class communities in Detroit. Whiteness or White identity, both the meaning and construct, varied greatly according to socioeconomic class. “Whiteness can be ideologically and discursively distinct when viewed from a national or global perspective, appeared ‘on the ground’ in Detroit to be inundated with heterogeneous social materials that were not abstractable into one racial category” (1997:181). He explores the difference between suburban and urban cultural space. Hartigan asserts that there is a change in the power of Whites that is directly associated with their class status. Perhaps the most poignant example of this contrast was when he described the baseball games that took place in a stadium located in the inner city. There was an influx of wealthy White suburbanites that contrasted greatly, in status, with the inner city Whites who were parking the suburbanites’ cars at the stadium. He examines how a White identity can be positive for one group (suburbanites) and negative for another (poor inner city whites). Whiteness is not a one to one equation, synonymous with power. Poverty is a contributing factor to identity alongside race. Hartigan claims that race matters are manipulable depending on a variety of contexts connected to one’s class position (203). This study emphasizes the importance of taking a multidimensional perspective when examining ethnic identity, and also the importance of class. The White population is not a singular identity, but rather multiple points of intersection of various elements.
Italian American Identity and the Diversity Encompassed Within: a Confluence of Factors

L: You know there’s, one of the things that I’ve noticed is that there’s a big difference between Northern and Southern Italy, where the Northern half of Italy is considered more upper class and richer. That’s where the money is, that’s where you’ve got Milan and the fashion shows and Northern Italians still to this day look down on Southern Italians because actually they don’t really produce anything in Northern Italy it’s all the farm and all the agriculture is done in the South, it still is and so if you’re from the South you’re kind of looked down upon a little bit that you’re not from that Northern area. Actually I’ve had experiences personally that it was at a restaurant on St Rose (name of restaurant). The gentlemen there was from Northern Italy, the owner and I went in there with, for work, with a bunch of my managers and one of them said “hey he’s from Italy too,” and he asked me what part and I told him Southern Italy and “oh the poorer part of Italy.” And I just kind of shot him a look like wait a minute here, we never met before, but you still see the animosity between Northern and Southern and it’s interesting that people to this day still have that issue. I’m a soccer fanatic and I watch it every time it’s on and you can still see the battles, the clubs that play from Northern, you can still see the battles from Northern and Southern Italy that they take this so seriously that the South is so looked down upon because they’re not considered the upper class or elite, that they’re the working people. It was weird I mean, I’ve never experienced anything like that before.

D: So where are your ancestors from again?
L: Actually we’re from all parts of Italy, I’ve got one side of my family is from Puglia, which is on the Northeastern Coast of Italy, I’ve got family from Rome, family from Naples.

S: But you have family from Southern Italy, right? Because people always go, oh don’t tell anybody you’re from Southern Italy.

L: Right.

D: Now the gentleman in the restaurant was he actually from Italy?

L: Yeah, yeah.

D: Or was he Italian American?

L: No he was born in Italy and then started his restaurant the whole deal but you could

S: I think they went out of business.

D: But do you think that that attitude is with Italian Americans as well?

L: That’s the only time I’ve ever experienced that, the only time. It was really strange.

D: So you don’t think that Italian Americans recognize those differences even if they don’t openly discriminate, but they kind of recognize or identify, like oh I’m we’re from this area, so then like identify with people from that region?

L: Identification from regions, absolutely, absolutely. My dad passed away a few years ago, and I was at the cemetery with my Italian soccer jersey on and a lady, she was in her 70s she goes oh my paisan, I heard you’re from Naples. And I said yes I have family from Italy and that was like a connection point that we had family from the same, that we had family from the same city and that’s once we find out you’re from the same city it’s like you’re family automatically, there’s that connection there.
S: She cried when she met him, she was like I haven’t seen anyone from there in a very long time.

L: This woman I’ve never met. Yeah, it’s amazing.

This excerpt, of Lenny and Susan detailing their experience regarding the Northern/Southern divide of Italian culture, highlights several pertinent elements of Italian American diversity. Often, because Italian Americans are not considered one of the “new” or “rapidly arriving” ethnic groups, they are not considered to be immigrants, they are not considered to possess an immigrant point of view. However, Lenny’s experience with the restaurateur of Northern Italian heritage is a firm reminder that Italian American, as a category, is quite diverse. There are various segments of identity contained within this category, and among these the newly arrived or even those that have been in the country for some time as first generation immigrants. These immigrants carry with them the beliefs of the Old Country, and these beliefs replenish the culture of third and fourth generation Italian Americans and amalgamate with it.

One of my research participants who immigrated to the United States from Italy over fifty years ago- yet still maintains close ties to Italy- informed me that the Italian American culture in American is “old” and that modern Italians do not adhere to many of the same sentiments or cultural aspects anymore because it is now antiquated in contemporary Italy. Yet somehow, for some reason the cultural aspects that were carried over by immigrants (such as culinary inheritance among others) is still believed to be authentic and is still maintained by third and fourth generation ethnics now, although it differs from the current Italian culture itself:
F: I said all they have the Italian Americans born in the United States were raised by all the immigrants okay now as you know the first immigrants, Italians that came to the United States were, a lot of them were illiterate, didn’t know how to write so that’s why a lot of last names have been mangled by these people that would write the um officers that were at Ellis Island and that’s why they are different so when they go off to Italy to find their roots etcetera, they are a little confused when they cannot find and then they say oh but maybe was, and was yeah and then a lot of people, a lot of people here in the United States had to change their last name make it English uh as you know because they were ostracized for they were Italian immigrants, you know that, okay um. Yeah I met a lot of these people even nowadays, especially people from the East from New York, Boston I mean the East Coast yes very they’re still following like they make the same sauce, just to give you an example uh I have a friend who is born in U.S.A. but the parents came from Italy right okay and she say I’m going to cook the sauce all day and I said what? What are you making? Paste? And she said oh no that’s the way my grandma made it. I said, you cook it one hour and it’s done. She said, it’s not done it takes, I said who comes from Italy you or I? Okay and uh so this is what I say they learn from their grandmother, oh my grandmother used to say and they have all these nice memories but I said that’s gone I mean it’s no more. So but uh the families are still nice thing in Italy, the units of the family still very important.

Fabrizia further illustrates her viewpoint that certain Italian Americans appear to be caught in a time warp. They have no association to the Italian culture from Italy, only remnants of what they believe to be an authentic Italian culture. This culture, according to Fabrizia, is outdated and no longer exists in Italy:
F: And I don’t know about I have been in New York couple of times but also I you know friends like from the Club they have relatives there and everything is always the same there, always the same, I don’t think things change. You know? So I don’t those people they just, they just stay there, they don’t evolve, they don’t progress I don’t think so, I think they stay the same. Yeah cause see like couple from like Niagra Falls they tell me about the food etc., still the 1900’s.

D: So that’s what I was thinking because earlier when you mentioned that there still seems to be this ideology with some of the people that you have spoken to from Back East that they still believe in this difference and that it’s advantageous to have this fair skin and there’s this difference between Northern and Southern culture, do you think that’s true because like you said they’re behind because they’re

F: (nods)

D: Oh okay.

F: They do not know what’s happening in Italy.

D: Okay.

F: And they still think that what the grandmother said still there, still continuing.

Constantino further details this divide between Italian Americans and Old World Italians:

D: Within that category of people that identify as Italian American, what are some of the differences like if you break the category further down like what are some of the differences maybe, that you could recognize among Italian Americans?

C: Well you know that question is gotta be answered a couple of different ways because it depends on your age. Well it really does, you know people that are in the same generation well there’s differences, there’s a difference between if you would consider
yourself old school or old world or more really more American Italian than Italian American. You know certainly the younger generation I don’t believe have the same sense of their ethnicity and that as people my age do and older than me.

Rachel and Tom, whose both sets of parents immigrated from Italy, explore the various differences between Italian Americans and Italians from Italy at the Club:

D: Oh no it’s just anything that comes to mind, in your opinion so you think, are there any other differences that people might recognize like categories within the category of Italian American?Like that you guys recognize.

R: Oh you mean when we’re together there would be differences as far as

D: Yeah.

R: I don’t know.

T: Just uh we get together on special occasions and

R: Family, real family oriented and you’ve heard that before I’m sure. But I don’t know do you think there are as far as the people the groups of people in the Club. Well the problem is is that we all, the people that we are very close to have the same values as we have so it’s kind of different uh I don’t know I was thinking about [name of Club member] certainly you know he has he is straight from Italy so he you know he speaks Italian and he has more of an Italian palette, I don’t know and I don’t mean that taste wise I just mean overall so maybe that would be, we don’t quite have that.

D: So Italians from Italy versus like born and raised here.

R: Yes exactly yeah and you know who else, is [name of Club member] I think when him and his wife came over, when we were at [name of Club member]’s party yeah you could certainly
Filipo explains his feelings regarding prejudice within the Italian American community. He feels that Italians from Italy possess a viewpoint that regards themselves as “true Italians” and Italian Americans, for lack of a better description, as inauthentic ethnics:

D: So in your opinion how do people differentiate themselves within the category of Italian American? So what smaller differences can be found within that broad category of people that identify as Italian American, what kind of differences can you see?

F: Whose doing the identifying? Italian Americans or people that are not Italian?

D: Italian Americans.

F: Other Italian Americans identify with other Italian Americans in the community?

D: Yes.

F: I think the ones that come from Italy, the ones that were born in Italy look differently upon Italian Americans that are in the United States because they aren’t as culturally oriented as the ones that come from Italy.

D: Okay so any other differences that you might note within that category that they recognize amongst themselves?

F: I think again, Italian Americans, Italians who are not Italian Americans are probably a little prejudice against Italian Americans because they do not really possess the structure of what it is to be a true Italian.

D: True Italian.

F: What true Italian? (laughs)
Lenny and Susan’s recounting of the discrimination they faced by an Italian from Italy also drives home the point that regional differences are still recognized, at least by the older segment of Italian Americans. Regional differences, at times, and indeed the Northern/Southern divide were noted by several other research participants.

Alan Balboni (1996) recognizes that by the third and fourth generation, most Italian Americans possess other ethnic heritage as well. I centered one of my interview questions on the plight of the third and fourth generation ethnic and how they may still recognize differences within the category of Italian American. It is this particular set of data that most participants concur with the assimilationist mentality as evidenced by Salvatore’s explanation of third and fourth generation Italian Americans:

D: Do you think that like second and third generation Italian Americans still adhere to regional identification?

S: Sometimes, it depends on how their family tree and how alive they kept their culture. And that usually depends on one thing that depends on if they had an elder that had lived through at least three or four generations that could still, that they could learn from and pass those traditions on down the line. An example is, matter of fact my wife’s mother she lived to about 85 years old and she’s what you call a second generation Italian or Sicilian because her mother was right from the Old Country, so she was actually the first offspring you know born in the country but her mother passed on all these traditions from the Old Country. They lived like the Old Country so when she had her own family she was able to pass on these same traditions to her children and that’s how it keeps the regional ethnicity and culture alive with their family. But if they die early for example and they didn’t come over or whatever, and you have now become more Americanized
you forget that culture, you just have a last name that ends in a vowel and there’s you
don’t really know and therefore you weren’t really brought up that way so it would be
just like everybody else in America. A lot of arrogant Italians will think that they’re
better than everybody else but the truth of the matter is nobody is, but since their culture
and their charismatic attitudes and personality is so ingrained with the way they’re portrayed in the public eye, especially the media, they feel they have to live up to
something and it’s usually a derogatory way it’s usually based around all the mob movies
that you see on tv and a lot of people to this day, think that that’s how we’re supposed to act. That’s not it at all and if they would go to a neighborhood they would see people act
just like everybody else, it they went to Main St, USA, same difference anywhere else so
and that’s pretty much how that works yeah so if there’s no one there to tie them from the old traditions into more modern or down the line, 2nd, 3rd, 4th generation then it gets lost and it gets forgotten about. That’s always why it’s always cool to have a family tree and do some genealogy.

Although this sentiment has been reflected by several interviewees, there is still evidence that intermarriage does not necessarily equate to cultural demise. I have met several non-
Italian American wives of Italian American men who now consider themselves Italian American, above their own ethnic background. They have, in essence, “married in” to the culture and have adopted all of the characteristics and mannerisms they feel are authentic to Italian Americans.

Susan, Lenny’s non Italian American wife, explains that the influence of Italian culture has rubbed off on her and she is in the process of becoming Italian:

_D: So are you Italian also?_
S: I’m not Italian I’m just about everything else but Italian. Literally.

L: We’re teaching her though.

S: I’ve been with him so long though, the influence kind of rubbed off.

L: My aunt keeps telling her, I say we’ll make her Italian yet (laughs) and she laughs.

Similarly, Carla explains that she did not identify with her own ethnic background and fused her ethnic identity with that of her husband, who is Italian American:

C: Him and his examples.

N: Well there you go right, a perfect example.

D: And if you don’t mind my asking, what is your ethnic background?

C: I’m half [other ethnic group], half [other ethnic group]

D: Okay.

C: [other ethnic group] (laughs)

D: Okay now so do you identify as Italian American too, being that you married in?

C: Yeah cause I yeah right, it’s been so long.

G: Italian American heritage.

C: I didn’t have much to begin with?

G: Why is that?

C: Cause we didn’t have all the family, like your father had. It was just my mother. My brothers were all in other places.

N: It was boring.

G: We love you, but it was. (laughs)

These excerpts provide evidence of an alternate viewpoint on the intermarriage equals the dissolution of culture factor. Cultural influence can go both ways: from a mainstream
ethnic group to the “ethnic” group but also from the “ethnic” group to the mainstream ethnic group. This is further support for the fact that White ethnic identity is not completely fading away, its influence transitions over in a myriad of ways. This also is an example of how race or ethnic identity is flexible. People operate outside of the given categories and find meaning and relevance according to their own unique life circumstances.

Axis of Differentiation, Axis of Similarity

As detailed throughout this thesis, census categories promote a cohesive White identity. The submission of one’s own cultural identity in lieu of this larger national construct indeed has its advantages. However, I have found throughout my research, that Italian Americans still recognize difference not only within their own ethnic group but also within the larger designation of White or Caucasian. A further example that Italian Americans are not completely assimilated is the recognized differences between Italian American culture and “White” or Anglo-American culture that were noted by my research participants. While Italian Americans may be now included into the White ethnic bracket they still differentiate themselves from complete Whiteness which they associate with an Anglo ethnic background:

*S: I guess to be Americanized, to be born in the United States of America.

D: Okay. So what are the differences, in your opinion between WASPs and Italian Americans?

*S: Aside from the religious factors, I’d have to wow that’s going to be a hard one, that is a hard one. Well they have a lot of cultural differences. My opinion on this is, the Anglo-Saxon Protestants, with all due respect, they think that they were, historically speaking,
they feel that they are more superior over everybody in general and that is even apparent today unfortunately and that’s just a fact of life. And you can see that every day, every facet of life, politics is probably the best example of that.

D: Okay.

S: So religion would be another example of that, because those two go hand in hand transparently, and they’re not supposed to in our culture, being Americans try to keep church and state separated but it’s very very apparent. And anybody else beneath them is a person in second class or criminal in some ways, that’s how they look at it.

D: So then Italian Americans do you think are more open minded? Not as judgmental of

S: I think that well I think they are somewhat judgmental and I know that some of them in some parts they are very up front with you they’re not, they don’t like to beat around the bush on subject matter. I think it has to do with ancestral history where they’ve been beaten up so many times over the centuries that they can’t afford to not get right to the subject of the matter at hand.

D: So what are some of the cultural differences that you mentioned between WASPs and Italian Americans?

S: Um WASPs are more aristocratic. That’s one of the traits, they try to live a standard of life that is more upper scale to a certain degree, I mean there’s hard working middle class and under middle class Protestants too, but they still have they’re more culturally speaking I think they are, they have more security. They’re brought up and designed to live a certain quality of life that was gonna be easier for them as opposed to like um they don’t consider themselves peasants. Like they consider everybody else peasants. But the Italians are hard working people, a lot of them became prominent focal figures in
business, finances, television, radio, movies and so forth. Their, I would have to say that their characteristics are a little harder edged and probably more appreciative of what they have compared to the Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

D: So what about family differences between them?

S: Between.

D: Like how family culture or

S: Catholic family unity is very close knit and that’s pretty prominent in most Catholic families. They’re very big, family is everything, everything is around, circulates around the family that has to do with every aspect of their lives, it doesn’t even matter what it is. They’re very God conscious and they could be, most are very I’d have to say to a certain degree even today in this country they’re very religious to a point. They take pride in all the religious factors when they bring new people into the world with the baptismal and so forth, confirmations they’re… that’s a big thing for them. And it’s usually pretty close knit, you’ll also find in this culture that they don’t move too far away from each other, they stay pretty well put to their families. Like for example, my wife, her sister, or one of her sisters lives here, at one point they all lived here together, very close in close proximity, you know. My family for example most of them moved to [state on the West Coast] and we all lived, one lived across the street and the other next door and then next door to each other so that was really close. But that’s how we lived Back East too, we lived in the same building, so each floor had a different, had an aunt and uncle or cousin or the grandparents or whatever so you can envision that, one person one family could actually take three or four floors of a building and they would stay there forever, which is very apparent even in today’s times with everybody in like, you see it a lot of times in the
Spanish culture or even in this city where their relatives all, they have a house and they have a number of relatives next door or one over on the next block, everybody is kinda close and everything is regulated around the Catholic church for them, for the most part. Good hard working people, the criminal element of these cultures, they don’t they kinda forget that to a certain thing, they exaggerate it, they put on a show for you like it’s important but it really isn’t, it’s all about themselves but traditional families like this are really, really close and they’re really active in those roles.

It is apparent that Salvatore recognizes that there are religious, cultural and political differences that still separate Italian Americans from the “Whitest” ethnic group: White Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

Most Italian Americans interviewed recognized a difference between Italian Americans and White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Primary differences noted were those in relation to familial structure and relationships and food. Adriana explains that a strong sense of family is central to Italian Americans:

**D:** Okay so those are some personality characteristics can you think of any cultural differences off the top of your head between those two groups?

**A:** Oh I don’t know my kids always tell me, that’s all you do is feed me. I mean we come from a tradition you know as soon as my grandkids come to my house they go “Grandma Manga Manga Grandma” you know and they just my grandson he’s nine now but when he was little as soon as he walked in the house he’d go “Grandma Adriana Manga Manga” he’d go right to my dining room and sit at the table. I don’t care if he just ate breakfast he would come to my house and just know that I’m going to feed him. I’m sure that’s not what you were looking for (laughs). But now I forgot the question.
D: Um like cultural differences between those two groups.

A: I think we come from you know the cultural difference with us is I really think that the Italians have a very very strong sense of family. And I don’t know if it’s, if maybe part of it is we really know how to lay the guilt, you know about not going to see your mother, not going to see your father how dare you what kind of children are you and so but I think we have a real strong sense of family and of obligation to each other possibly.

Constantino notes that a strong sense of family is represented by affection and quality time spent with the family. He is careful to mention, however, that he does not consider WASPs to love their children any less, only their love is manifest in other ways:

D: So do you think there’s any differences between White Anglo-Saxon Protestants and Italian Americans now?

C: Well certainly there are um you know it’s hard to really pinpoint what they are there’s uh I know a few (laughs) I don’t know that if that’s the next question, is if there are what could they be?

D: Yeah sure.

C: You know I can only say based on some of my experiences, I think that the uh White Anglo Protestant people you’re talking about compared to Italian Americans is I don’t think they love their family or their children any less I don’t think they show it as affectionately as Italians do and in actual physical demonstration of that I also don’t think that they’re involved as much in the day to day basis of their life of their kids. Like adolescents to adults you know. I think that I know many that have moved away and don’t see brothers or sisters and don’t see mothers and fathers for years at a time, that can’t happen with Italians. It’s a little different, like I said I don’t know it doesn’t mean
that they don’t love them, love them any different but their notion of it is a little different.

I know that another difference I would like back up farther and talk about family holidays
for example, Easter you know Thanksgiving meal or Christmas meal Italians, almost all
Italians sit around the table for hours and hours at a time, dinners are easily three, four
hours you know or more I mean and American Anglos that you’re talking about like this
in an hour they’re in and out you know what I mean, two hours later everybody’s going
home.

D: Or eating in front of the tv or something like that?

C: Yeah, yeah. In our house, growing up, and with my kids growing up, we ate dinner
together at the dinner table every single day, every single day. A lot of people can’t say
that. That’s some of the differences.

In addition to differences in family relations, Italian Americans notice a difference in
terms of culinary heritage and also, in the following expert, Nico, Carla and Gabriella
again recognize a class and religious difference:

D: Okay so I know earlier you guys mentioned that there’s this difference between White
Anglo-Saxon Protestants and Italian Americans, like what are some of those differences
again?

N: The food alone, just the food if you’re White/Anglo you’ve got lousy food, you really
do, everything is white (laughs) give me a break.

C: (laugh)

G: (laughs)
N: You know what I mean, they’re food sucks. That’s why Italian food is number one, and all people love the food they’re not going to go hey give me some of that White Anglo-Saxon food over there.

C: Yeah, it’s bland.

N: Bland.

G: Religiously you know there are a lot of differences.

C: Oh yeah.

N: That too, religion they’re more, what do you say they’re not Catholic. There’s nothing wrong with being, I’m just saying they’re different.

D: So what other, are there any other cultural differences?

N: Yeah all the way around everything, they’re just totally different.

D: Everything?

N: Different, the way they dress, everything. Let me put it this way, if you lived in [name of city] and you were a White, Anglo-Saxon how did you put it okay? And you put them in, say the West side of the city of [name of city], you’d be dead in an hour (laughs)

G: (laughs)

N: He couldn’t get his way out he ain’t gonna find his way out.

G: Stick out like a sore thumb.

N: Stick out like a sore thumb and they’d go “look at that sucker over there, let’s get him.” That’s the way it is.

C: Are you guys bad so what are you gonna do? Mug him.

N: If you stuck your nose, when I was a kid.

C: You didn’t go into other neighborhoods.
N: You stayed in your own neighborhood.

C: Stayed in your own neighborhood.

N: You didn’t go elsewhere.

C: You were asking for trouble.

N: Right.

D: Okay so you think, everything even with family?

N: Everything’s different, you know.

Nico is correct, when he contends that “everything is different.” There is vast diversity that exists within the widely utilized, yet extremely simplistic ethnic category of White. Italian Americans determine their ethnic identity through an aggregate of factors. Although various theorists, such as Richard Alba, proclaim that Italian Americans and other White ethnics are in the twilight of ethnicity, I have found that there is still a strong sense of culture and ethnic pride amongst Las Vegas Italian Americans. Although participants recognize that the culture transitions with each generation they all voiced a desire to preserve it and an importance of teaching each succeeding generation about the struggles of their ancestors.

Conclusion: That Which Remains…..

While various theorists maintain that Italian Americans, as well as other ethnic groups, are losing their distinctiveness my study illustrates that there is still a rich tapestry of culture that exists for Las Vegas Italian Americans. Structural elements of influence, such as the census categories, endeavor to remove aspects of culture so that only trace elements remain. The whitening of America is represented through an insistence on categorization and a reliance on a system that intertwines elements of class
Physical differences mark the divide between those in positions of power and those lacking. As long as this dependence on physical markers of differentiation continue, so will systems of inequality. Anatomo-politics centered on skin color and other physical attributes promote this division by socio-race.

Italian Americans demonstrate that ethnic identity is fluid and it persists despite the many factors that strive to undermine its continuation. Italian Americans distinctive place and positioning within contemporary American culture demonstrate that there is much division and diversity within state generated ethnic categories. Ethnic identity persists and in fact thrives despite these many challenges. The culture that was of the immigrants may not remain intact exactly, yet it continues to transition and retransition through the many different markers of ethnic differentiation discussed throughout this thesis.

Once, after one of my interviews, I went walking in a garden with Isabella. She maintains a lovely herb garden here in the desert. During my tour of her garden we talked about food and how best to embellish it with the various herbs. She asked me if I cook and I said, “sometimes,” though admittedly I was still learning. Next, she insisted that I take a variety of her herbs home: fennel and thyme and sage among others. While explaining how best to utilize each herb she hacked away at her delicate herb garden, eagerly stuffing a huge paper bag full of herbs for me to take home. I will remember this the most, a generosity to teach, to share, to invite outsiders to participate and become part of the community. These are all traits that are indicative of Italian culture, and I am quite sure they show no sign of abating with time. As we were leaving the garden Isabella
looked over at me and said, “Now this is what I want you to remember….this is Italian.”

And I did.
APPENDIX 1

CULTURAL DOMAIN ANALYSIS

Ethnicity of participant

Word Associations:
1) Italian American
2) Northern Italy
3) Southern Italy
4) Curly hair
5) Tan skin
6) Pale skin
7) Straight hair
8) Blonde
9) Blue eyes
10) Dark hair
11) Dark complexion
12) Fair complexion
13) Italian (as in European not Italian American)

Ethnicity: Irish/English

1) Good food and music
2) Left blank
3) Left blank
4) Lucky
5) Lays in the sun
6) Avoids sun
7) Hope it’s clean
8) Midwest
9) Midwest
10) Lucky
11) Lucky
12) Nordic background
13) Singer, usually good cook and good looking

Ethnicity: Cuban American

1) New York
2) Preidonti
3) Sicily
4) Rollers
5) Tan, Tony Bennet
6) White
7) Prince
8) Marilyn Monroe
9) Frank Sinatra
10) Sammy Davis
11) Nat King Cole
12) George Bush
13) Roman

Ethnicity: Belgian American
1) Italian ancestry now living in America
2) Tuscan
3) Mediterranean
4) Sensuous
5) Sun worshipper
6) Northern
7) Virtuous
8) Scandinavian
9) Northern
10) Southern
11) Southern
12) Temperate
13) Hardworking, good looking, compassionate person who loves food and wine

Ethnicity: mixed American, Swedish and Indian heritage
1) Spaghetti and meatballs and garlic bread
2) Canals and gondolas
3) Sicily, the tow of Italy’s boot
4) Shirley Temple
5) Sun dwellers
6) Vampires
7) Models
8) Dumb
9) Angels
10) Sexy, handsome
11) African American
12) Swedish
13) Hairy people

Ethnicity: American
1) Very nice people, fun to be with
2) Don’t know except that the Pope lives in Italy
3) Don’t know except that the Pope lives in Italy
4) Nice
5) Okay
6) Okay
7) Okay
8) Most of it comes from bleaching hair
9) Amazing
10) Very nice
11) Attractive
12) Good
13) Don’t know

Ethnicity: American
1) Left blank
2) Left blank
3) Left blank
4) A boy I went to school with
5) Left blank
6) Left blank
7) Left blank
8) Left blank
9) Left blank
10) Left blank
11) Left blank
12) Left blank
13) Left blank

Ethnicity: Irish, German, Polish, Italian
1) Me
2) Mountains and don’t know the people can’t give opinion because I’m not familiar
3) Better than the North
4) Alright don’t mind curly hair but dudes look goofy with curly hair and also reminds me of “Black folk” or African Americans
5) Good to be tan, can’t be too white
6) Looks ghostly, reminds me of Yankees and White people
7) Okay looks good on some people, is cute, reminds me of White people
8) White people and women with big boobs, ditzy and have more fun
9) Frank Sinatra and German
10) Friendly in general
11) Too much sun, I like darker, I’m naturally dark
12) Needs a little bit more sun
13) Clothes are way too tight

Ethnicity: Italian, English and Indian
1) Pasta
2) Mamma mia
3) South side, yeah
4) Cute
5) Mexicano
6) Vampire
7) Pretty
8) Dumb
9) Sexy time
10) Sexy
11) Foreigner
12) Vampire
13) Sweaty

Ethnicity: Italian American
  1) Second generation Italian
  2) Never been there
  3) Father came from Southern Italy
  4) Wasn’t fortunate to have curly hair
  5) Did not mind having an olive complexion
  6) Never
  7) Hair straight and black
  8) Not a blonde in the family
  9) Brown eyes in our family
  10) Always like dark hair
  11) Only if I tan
  12) Never
  13) Born here, parents born there. It’s wonderful being Italian, good food, good personality and family oriented.

Ethnicity: Italian American
  1) That’s what I am
  2) Milan
  3) Sicily
  4) Cute
  5) Wrinkles
  6) Indian
  7) My hair
  8) Dye job
  9) Pretty
  10) Okay
  11) Okay
  12) Okay
  13) Our family

Ethnicity: Italian American
  1) (unclear word) or nice
  2) Snobs
  3) Common
  4) Do not like, reminds me of African people
  5) Tan from the sun, okay
  6) Like pale skin, easy to look at
  7) Easy to maintain and deal with
  8) Bright and nice to see on people and natural the same
  9) They seem to tell the truth
  10) Left blank
11) Okay
12) Great
13) Not so impressed with Italian folks, not comfortable with them

Ethnicity: Italian American
1) Italian descent but born in the U.S.
2) Place of my birth and the Alps
3) Warmer climate
4) My daughter
5) Try to avoid
6) Need some sun
7) My hair
8) My color hair and Northern Italy
9) No one in my family
10) Southern Italian
11) Southern Italian
12) Northern Italian
13) Loves food, family is very important, beautiful language and much history

Ethnicity: Italian (born and raised in Italy)
1) Italiano
2) Left blank
3) Pontec or Jo
4) Bonde
5) Bianco
6) Skin nero
7) Capelli ricci
8) Marone
9) Occhi neri
10) Capelli biondi
11) Bianco
12) Scuro complexion
13) I sono Italiano

Ethnicity: Italian (born and raised in Italy)
1) Born in Italy and come to the U.S. to become a citizen
2) A lot of history
3) A lot of fountains, a lot of work, industries
4) Most Italians are noted for this feature
5) Certain dialects of Italians are darker skinned
6) Not too many Italians are light skinned
7) Not too many Italians have straight hair
8) From the bottle
9) Blonde hair and blue eyes are not seen on too many Italians
10) Natural
11) Certain parts of Italy
12) Not many Italians
13) Very family oriented and stylish

Ethnicity: American and Italian (born and raised in the U.S. but now have dual citizenship) [they completed the survey at the same time so their answers are intermingled]

1) Not too Italian
2) Good people
3) Best in the world
4) Very nice, reminds me of my babies
5) Okay, not too crazy for it, other participant likes it
6) Nah, acceptable, reminiscent of the Powder movie, very pretty and doll-like
7) It’s good
8) Okay and strawberry blonde is excellent
9) Pretty and all the kids have it but one
10) Yes, very attractive
11) That’s good and a lot of Italians are
12) Lovely and very pleasing
13) The greatest people, unique personalities, very different from the U.S., accept anything, make bad scene very pleasant and turn it around, honest and true people, our own culture, not like the U.S.
APPENDIX 2

SOCIAL CLASS IN THE PHYSICAL REALM

Class Questionnaire- Physical Indicators of Social Class:

1) What can you tell about a person by their physical appearance?
2) What attire do you consider to be “classy” or “elegant?”
3) What picture comes to mind with:
   a) High heels-
   b) Thigh high boots-
   c) Overalls-
   d) Evening dress-
   e) Business suit-
   f) Button up white shirt-
   g) Acrylic nails-
   h) Largely teased or permed hair-
   i) Unkempt facial hair-
   j) Baggy jeans-
   k) Gold jewelry-

4) Do you think physical attributes influence how someone is perceived (as far as social class?)
5) How would you (physically) describe someone that is “low class?”
6) How would you (physically) describe someone that is “high class?”

Age: 75
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Italian American
Level of education: High school
Occupation: Retired
1) If they are neat or sloppy
2) Formal wear
3)
   a) Sore feet
   b) Left blank
   c) Worker
   d) Party
   e) Party
   f) Party
   g) Not good for you
   h) Dating yourself
   i) Okay
   j) Okay
   k) Okay
4) Yes
5) Left blank
6) Left blank

Age: 74
Gender: Female
Ethnicity: Irish/English
Level of education: High school
Occupation: Retired business owner

1) How much they care about themselves and their impression they make to others
2) Heels- dressy suits- chiffon gowns
3) a) Love to see
   b) Trendy
   c) Not for Las Vegas
   d) Takes the time to look good
   e) Dresses for advancement
   f) Good for you
   g) Can’t do housework
   h) Outdated
   i) Ugly and dirty
   j) Should be banned
   k) Too much=gaudy, just right= smart
4) Absolutely
5) Overweight, dirty hair, lack of teeth, poor hygiene, oversize or undersize clothing
6) Dressed appropriately, clean hair and nails, smells good, light amount of jewelry

Age: 65
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Italian-Italian, born in Italy
Level of education: High school
Occupation: Retired

1) Left blank
2) Suits, ties, dresses for women or pants suits
3) a) Young
   b) 60s
   c) Farmer
   d) Elegant
   e) Classy
   f) Classy
   g) Fake
   h) Fake
   i) Dirty
j) Sloppy
k) Classy
4) Yes
5) Sloppy dresser
6) Someone that takes pride in their cleanliness and how they dress

Age: 74
Gender: Female
Ethnicity: Italian American
Level of education: Some college
Occupation: Consultant

1) Personal habits, way of talking, presentation
2) Left blank
3)
a) Okay
b) Trash
c) No
d) Love
e) Love
f) Yes, good
g) No- don’t like
h) No- don’t like
i) No- don’t like
j) No- don’t like
k) Wonderful
4) Yes
5) No answer
6) No answer

Age: 74
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Belgian-American
Level of education: Master’s Degree/Other Professional Degree
Occupation: Semi-retired

1) Modest, clean, self-worth, pride
2) Well fitting suit, navy blue or black
3)
a) Sexy legs
b) High water
c) Back to the hills
d) Elegant
e) Professional
f) Professional
g) Phony
h) Nice touch
i) Bad news
j) Father’s pants
k) Leave it at home
4) Yes
5) Unshaven/needs haircut/smells/dirty wrinkled clothes/ tennis shoes or gym shoes or unshined shoes and doesn’t speak well
6) Clean shaven/neat hair/uses deodorant/shaved/clean shoes, shirt and clothes/speaks well

Age: 62
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Italian American (Northern descent)
Level of education: Bachelor’s degree
Occupation: Broker/salesman/real estate/ semi-retired

1) Whether they have money or not
2) Suit, tie, tux for men, ensemble for women
3) 
   a) Sexy
   b) Really sexy
   c) Bummer
   d) Nice
   e) Okay
   f) Too stuffy
   g) Okay
   h) Oh mamma mia!
   i) Disgusting
   j) Poor taste
   k) Okay
4) Absolutely!
5) Dirty clothes, missing teeth, not well groomed
6) Designer clothes, very well groomed, jewelry

Age: 54
Gender: Female
Ethnicity: American, Swedish and Indian
Level of education: High school
Occupation: Reservationist

1) Whether they are friendly or not
2) Black dress and heels
3) 
   a) Strippers
   b) Winter dress up
   c) Comfy, weekend clothes
d) Dinner and dancing
e) Meetings
f) Weddings
g) Nice hands
h) 1980s
i) Tacky
j) Hate them, needs belt
k) Classy night wear

4) Yes
5) Maybe poorly dressed, down and out, broke
6) Dressed well, lots of jewelry, refined

Age: 65
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Italian American
Level of education: High school
Occupation: Retired

1) If they are outgoing or shy
2) A suit
3) 
   a) Out on the town
   b) Have thin legs
   c) Farmer
   d) Fancy affair
   e) Works in office
   f) Stuffy
   g) Takes care of oneself
   h) Outdated
   i) Man, old man, women need removed
   j) Not good
   k) Love it but not too much
4) Yes, it shouldn’t but people are rude
5) I can’t, as long as a person is neat and clean that all that matters
6) Dressing, grooming, appearance

Age: 77
Gender: Female
Ethnicity: American
Level of education: High school
Occupation: Financial assistant secretary

1) Are they sociable, do they have money
2) Dress suit, evening gown
3)  
   a) Uncomfortable  
   b) Okay  
   c) Country  
   d) Nice  
   e) Great  
   f) Great with tie  
   g) Artificial  
   h) Good  
   i) Very bad  
   j) Horrible  
   k) Great  
4) Yes  
5) Dress in dirty clothes, language is not good  
6) Intelligent, friendly, dresses to impress

Age: 65  
Gender: Male  
Ethnicity: American, I was born here  
Education level: Some college  
Occupation: Retired

1) No answer  
2) No answer  
3)  
   a) Sexy  
   b) No answer  
   c) Farmer  
   d) Elegant  
   e) Business man  
   f) No answer  
   g) No answer  
   h) No answer  
   i) No answer  
   j) No answer  
   k) No answer  
4) No answer  
5) No answer  
6) No answer

Age: 21  
Gender: Female  
Ethnicity: Italian, English, French, Indian  
Level of education: High school  
Occupation: Reservations
1) What they look like
2) Long dress, low heels, fancy jewelry, spiraled hair

3)
   a) Tallness
   b) Hooker
   c) Hillbilly
   d) Pretty
   e) Business man
   f) Church
   g) Asian ladies talkin’ crap while you’re getting your nails done
   h) No answer
   i) Yuck, prickly, itchy
   j) Gang banger
   k) Tacky

4) Definitely
5) Overalls, unkempt hair, yellow teeth
6) Nicely dressed, white teeth, someone who obviously takes care of themselves

Age: 26
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Irish, Italian, German, Polish
Level of education: Some college
Occupation: Limo driver and security

1) If they’re nice people, eating habits
2) Suit- three piece, nice dress, shoes match
3)
   a) Hookers
   b) Hookers
   c) Hillbillies
   d) Classy
   e) Businessy, successful
   f) Successful
   g) Clean, hooker
   h) 80s
   i) Trashy
   j) Don’t care for, gangster, thuggish
   k) Flashy

4) Yes
5) N/A
6) Very clean cut, squared away, uppity up- Californians

Age: 85, 86
Gender: Female, Male
Ethnicity: Italian/American (dual citizenship)
Level of education: High school
Occupation: Retired electrician, artist/seamstress

1) Most everything/ don’t like the dress codes today
2) Tux/dresses. Very well dressed in New York, have nice appearance, so surprised in Las Vegas- we’re the only ones overdressed at shows, people were dressed like slobs
3) 
   a) My mother and wife always wore 
   b) No, don’t like 
   c) No, for work 
   d) Yes, only for occasion 
   e) Yes, yes 
   f) Yes, formally 
   g) No, no don’t like 
   h) No answer 
   i) No, always shave 
   j) No way 
   k) Yes, yes, yes
4) Yes, yes- tells what type of person you want to be 
5) Careless about actions, self esteem and the way they look 
6) Always dresses appropriately, never talks down to people, carries self with dignity, not stiff

Age: 68
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Italian
Level of Education: Jr. High = 4 GREdE in Italy
Occupation: Cook

1) Clean
2) Short dress
3) 
   a) No answer 
   b) No answer 
   c) No answer 
   d) Blake 
   e) White 
   f) No answer 
   g) Red 
   h) Largely teased 
   i) No answer 
   j) Yes 
   k) Gold
4) Do not know
5) Not clean
Very clean

Age: 37
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Cuban-American
Level of education: Some college
Occupation: Restaurant manager

1) Presentation
2) Men in suits, women- dresses
3) 
   a) Sexy
   b) Horny
   c) Suck
   d) Okay
   e) Alright
   f) No
   g) Fake
   h) Alright
   i) No answer
   j) Okay
   k) Bling is good
4) By presentation
5) Not taking care of themselves, bad hygiene and looks
6) Very groomed, clothes cleaned and dress, very stereotypical
APPENDIX 3
IRB APPROVALS

UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review
Approval Notice

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:
Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: March 23, 2009
TO: Dr. Jiemin Bao, Anthropology
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Paul Jones, Co-chair
Protocol Title: The Walls That Encompass Us: Unpacking White Ethnicity
Italian Americans and Las Vegas
Protocol #: 0811-2910

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46. The protocol has been reviewed and approved. The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB approval. The expiration date of this protocol is March 11, 2010. Work on the project may begin as soon as you receive written notification from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

PLEASE NOTE:
Attached to this approval notice is the official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.
Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB. Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond March 11, 2010, it would be necessary to submit a Continuing Review Request Form 60 days before the expiration date. If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.
Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review
Modification Approved

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:
Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: August 21, 2009
TO: Dr. Jiemin Bao, Anthropology
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Paul Jones, Chair
Protocol Title: The Walls That Encompass Us Unpacking White Ethnicity: Italian Americans and Las Vegas
Protocol #: 0811-2920

The modification of the protocol named above has been reviewed and approved. Modifications reviewed for this action include:

- Two questions will be added to the interview
- Instead of having participants write out answers, the researcher may now write out the responses if the participant chooses
- The maximum number of interview participants is increased from 15 to 30
- The minimum number of cultural domain analysis/questionnaire participants is decreased from 100 to 25.
- The anticipated termination date is now expected to be September 2009.

This IRB action will not reset your expiration date for this protocol. The current expiration date for this protocol is March 11, 2010.

Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond March 11, 2010, it would be necessary to submit a Continuing Review Request Form 60 days before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.
Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review
Modification Approved

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:
Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: April 21, 2009
TO: Dr. Jiemin Bao, Anthropology
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. J. Michael Stitt, Chair
Protocol Title: The Walls That Encompass Us: Unpacking White Ethnicity
Italian Americans and Las Vegas
Protocol #: 0811-2920

The modification of the protocol named above has been reviewed and approved. Modifications reviewed for this action include:
- One question is added to the questionnaire
- The total number of subjects is increased to 250

This IRB action will not reset your expiration date for this protocol. The current expiration date for this protocol is March 11, 2010. Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB. Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond March 11, 2010, it would be necessary to submit a Continuing Review Request Form 60 days before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.
Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review
Continuing Review Approved

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:
Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: February 17, 2010
TO: Dr. Jiemin Bao, Anthropology
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Charles Rasmussen, Co-Chair
Protocol Title: The Walls That Encompass Us: Unpacking White Ethnicity
Italian Americans and Las Vegas
Protocol #: 0811-2920

Continuing review of the protocol named above has been reviewed and approved. This IRB action will reset your expiration date for this protocol. The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB approval. The new expiration date for this protocol is February 11, 2011.

PLEASE NOTE:
Attached to this approval notice is the official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records. Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.
Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond February 11, 2011, it would be necessary to submit a Continuing Review Request Form 60 days before the expiration date.
If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.
Alba, Richard.

N.d. About Race: A Public Education Project. 

Anderson, Benedict.

Balboni, Alan.

Balboni, Alan

Barzini, Luigi.

Baumann, Gerd

Berreman, Gerald D.

Bondanella, Peter.

Bourdieu, Pierre.

Cadillac

Cahill, Caitlin.
Chock, Phyllis Pease.

Conforti, Joseph M.

Cordasco, Francesco.

DeSalvo, Louise.

Dewalt, Kathleen M. and Billie R. Dewalt.


Di Leonardo, Micaela.

Di Leonardo, Micaela.


Gallo, Patrick J.

Gambino, Richard.
Gambino, Richard.

Gibson, Mary.

Gans, Herbert.

Gardaphe, Fred.

Goffman, Erving.

Gribaudi, Gabriella.

Grieco, Elizabeth M.

Guglielmo, Thomas A.

Guglielmo, Thomas A.

Haney Lopez, Ian.
Hartigan Jr., John  

Hyman, Vicki.  

Italian American Club of Southern Nevada.  

Italian American Club of Southern Nevada photograph. Nd. Flickr/Yahoo.  

Jersey Couture.  

Jerseylicious.  

Jersey Shore.  

Juliani, Richard.  

Kellner, Douglas M. & Meenakshi, Gigi.  

LaGumina, Salvatore J.  

LaSorte, Michael A.  

Laurino, Maria.  
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Mangione, Jerre and Bene Morreale.

Martin, Judith N., with Robert L. Krizek, Thomas K. Nakayama and Lisa Bradford.

Massaro, Dominic R.

McIntosh, Peggy.

Mitrano, John & Mitrano, James.

Monti, Daniel J. Jr.

Nelli, Humbert.

Pryne, Eric.
The Real Housewives of New Jersey.

Rothman, Hal.

Saija, Marcello.

Schellenbaum, Paola.

Silver, Tisa.

Simich, Jerry & Thomas C. Wright.

Speranza, Gino C.

Sturino, Frank.

United States Census

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Vecoli, Rudolph J.
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University of Chicago Press.

Yanagisako, Sylvia and Carol Delaney.
VITA
Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Danielle Nicole Axt

Degrees:

Associate in Arts and Sciences, 2001
Pierce College, Puyallup, WA

Bachelor of Arts, 2003
Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA

Special Honors and Awards:

College of Liberal Arts Honors Convocation
Recognition for scholarship 
April 23, 2010

UNLV Scholarship Recognition Luncheon
Recognition for scholarship 
February 25, 2010

Southwestern Anthropological Association Best Graduate Student Paper Prize
Awarded for paper: Marketing White Ethnicity: An Anthropological Dialogue with an Ethnic Festival
Amount Awarded: $200.00 
May 2, 2009 Annual Conference

Phi Kappa Phi Initiation Ceremony
Recognition for membership 
April 22, 2009

UNLV College of Liberal Arts Honors Convocation
Recognition for scholarship 
April 22, 2009

UNLV Academic Success Center Scholarship Reception
Recognition for scholarship 
April 15, 2009

Society for Cross Cultural Research Best Graduate Student Paper Prize
Awarded for paper: The Walls That Encompass Us: Unpacking White Ethnicity
Amount Awarded: $200.00
February 21, 2008, Annual Conference

UNLV Annual Scholarship Recognition Luncheon
Recognition for scholarship 
February 20, 2008

UNLV College of Liberal Arts Honor Convocation
Recognition for scholarship 
April 30, 2008
UNLV Jean Nidetch Scholarship Awards Ceremony
Recognition for scholarship September 16, 2008

Graduated Magna Cum Laude
Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA May 2003

Graduated with Honors
Pierce College, Puyallup, WA June 2001

President’s Honor List
Pierce College, Puyallup, WA Spring 2000-Spring 2001

Dean’s Honor List
Pierce College, Puyallup, WA Winter 2000-Spring 2001
Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA Fall 2001-Spring 2003

Running Start Program Fall 1999 - Spring 2001
The Running Start Program is a state funded educational program that allows high school juniors and seniors to attend, either part or full time, classes at local community colleges, waiving tuition. I attended community college full time my junior and senior years of high school, which allowed me to graduate high school with an Associate in Arts and Sciences in addition to my high school diploma.

Presentations:

UNLV Entertainment Studies Symposium Invited session
Fuhgetaboutit: The Media, Language Ideology & The Sopranos
Las Vegas, NV March 22, 2007

Far West Popular and American Culture Association Annual Meeting
Fuhgetaboutit: The Media, Language Ideology & The Sopranos
Las Vegas, NV January 25-27, 2008

Society for Cross Cultural Research Annual Meeting
The Walls that Encompass Us: Unpacking White Ethnicity
New Orleans, LA February 21-24, 2008

UNLV Anthropology Society Brownbag Lecture
The Walls that Encompass Us: Unpacking White Ethnicity
Las Vegas, NV April 9, 2008

UNLV Graduate and Professional Student Association Annual Research Forum
The Walls that Encompass Us: Unpacking White Ethnicity
Las Vegas, NV March 28, 2009
Far West Popular and American Culture Association Annual Meeting
Beyond the Lights: Las Vegas and Film
Las Vegas, NV March 13- 15, 2009

Southwestern American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting
Marketing White Ethnicity: An Anthropological Dialogue with an Ethnic Festival
Las Vegas, NV April 30- May 2, 2009

Publications:


Thesis Title: Composite of Complexity: Manifestations of Whiteness and Class among Las Vegas Italian Americans

Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Jiemin Bao, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Heidi Swank, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Daniel Benyshek, Ph. D
Graduate Faculty Representative, Anthony Ferri, Ph. D.