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HYPHENATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS:  
HYPHENATORS, HYPHEN-HATERS, AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF  
AMBIGUITY

by

RACHELLE GERMANA

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and approved by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Hyphenation and Its Discontents: Hyphenators, Hyphen-Haters,  
and the Cultural Politics of Ambiguity

By RACHELLE GERMANA

Dissertation Director:  
Eviatar Zerubavel

This study explores the social logic of hyphenation, moving hyphenation beyond grammar and instead highlighting the way in which it performs socio-politically. In doing so, I use hyphenation as a gateway to a discussion about the cultural politics of ambiguity. In particular, I employ two settings of “hyphenated identities,” Hyphenated Americanism and surname hyphenation, to expose a hidden debate related more generally to ambiguity and ambivalence in American culture. A reading of these settings, which includes interviews with 30 surname hyphenators, reveals a conflict between hyphenation and cultural narratives that tend to favor unity, solidity, singularity, and an either/or vision of social categories. Within these cultural narratives, so-called Hyphenated Americans and surname hyphenators have often been similarly perceived as ambivalent and such a tendency exposes a tension not only between rigid and flexible logics for classifying identity, but also a related tension between the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity. Furthermore, the discourses surrounding the hyphenation of these identities also draw attention to the anxiety provoked by ambiguity and how this anxiety becomes shaped and reinforced by contrasting notions of purity and pollution, security

and danger, and social order and disorder. My analysis examines how these identities have been constituted and contested in this way and considers the implications for social classification more generally.

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## Chapter 1

### Meet Mr. Hyphen

Mr. Hyphen is good fellow, but he has to be watched.  
 – Edward N. Teall, *Meet Mr. Hyphen and Put Him in His Place*

The hyphen, arguably more than any other mark of punctuation, is engaged in a uniquely intimate relationship with identity. I question this engagement and how the aesthetic style of hyphenation might also be political (Brody 2008:6). In this sense, I move the mark of the hyphen beyond the realm of grammar and instead highlight its “cultural performances” (Brody 2008:6), focusing on how hyphenation might come to shape or even constitute identities, sending particular cultural messages about their meaning. This is not to say that these performances have not been contradictory or disputed. In fact, it is this contradictory tendency, what I see as the fundamental undecidability of the hyphen, that shapes this project. Such contradiction, and struggles to resolve it, become the cornerstone of the discourse surrounding hyphenation. A focus on this discourse, including the ways in which we have come to understand hyphenation as a cultural phenomenon, as well as the discursive production of the so-called “hyphenated identity” (Visweswaran 1994; Tamburri 1997; Sharobeem 2003; Sirin and Fine 2007; Zaal, Salah and Fine 2007), reveals a highly political cultural biography related specifically to American sentiments about ambiguity and ambivalence.

My attention to this discourse ultimately made me question the extent to which the work I had begun was even really about hyphenation. Instead, what surfaced was a

much more complex tension between rigid and flexible cultural logics (Zerubavel 1991), particularly in discourses related to the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity. And I found this tension and related themes to be surprisingly similar in two seemingly disparate identity settings, that of Hyphenated Americanism and that of surname hyphenation. A reading of these two settings and attention to the construction of the hyphenated identity within them reveals a highly contested and sometimes hidden debate related more generally to the politics and boundary-work of classification. On one hand the hyphenated identity is an expression of the vulnerability of boundaries – that there is some challenge to the stability of certain boundaries that results in a “reworking” of those boundaries through the hyphen. This reworking is certainly not without conflict or debate, and may not always lead to social change. Nonetheless, I contend that the concept of the hyphenated identity is sometimes drawn upon to express moments of “identity crisis,” in which certain boundaries, the binaries that stabilize them, and the corresponding social order, are being reevaluated. At the same time, the hyphenated identity has also been used toward a project of “identity-building” (Gamson 1995). In a cultural system that constantly attempts to qualify individuals “as a” particular identity, the hyphenated identity fills a niche. In this way, hyphenation becomes a specific articulation of identities entrenched in the “betwixt and between” (Turner 1967). Ultimately this means that in both Hyphenated Americanism and surname hyphenation, the ambivalent “realities” of the identities, often perceived as situated in more than one social location or as belonging to more than one category have been at odds with essentializing discourses and customs that tend to privilege unitary, singular, and mutually exclusive ways of classifying identity. Symbolically constituted through

hyphenation, this perceived dual location not only disrupts one-dimensional notions of identity, but also calls attention to the “cultural and social dissonances” surrounding identity classifications (Garber 1992:16). As a result, when it comes to American national discourse and family naming debates, the “hyphenate” (Brody 2008:86) often emerges as a category of ambiguous identity, signaling both a “category crisis” and a “crisis of category” (Garber 1992:17).

### **Working the Methodological Hyphen**

In highlighting these two settings, this research takes a transcontextual approach similar to that of social pattern analysis (Zerubavel 2007), focusing on the shared hyphenated scripts between surname hyphenation and Hyphenated Americanism rather than their substantive differences. To some extent this requires downplaying the obvious distinctions between these settings, including that of scale (Zerubavel 2007). For example, despite the fact that surname hyphenation takes place as a more micro-level and individuated identity behavior and ethnic-national hyphenation might be understood as a collective identity taking place more at the macro level, attending to the similar logics across these contexts requires at least some indifference to a conventional macro/micro split. Although an analysis of the political dynamics at the level of family identity may appear to be unrelated to an analysis of the politics at the level of national identity, these contexts are fundamentally similar when it comes to perceptions of hyphenation. By using these two cases and disregarding their different levels of aggregation as well as many of the qualitative differences of the identities, I highlight the way in which these cases act as different manifestations of very similar approaches to and readings of the

hyphen, which in turn provides a broader overall picture of how social actors in the United States have used and read the hyphen. Toward this end, I foreground the common underlying properties related to the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity. I understand the politics of identity here as a “naturalizing discourse,” in which identity boundaries are framed as essential, fixed, stable, unified, singular, and mutually exclusive (Baxter 2010). The politics of ambiguity, by contrast, “unnaturalizes” identity boundaries by foregrounding uncertainty, contradiction, ambivalence, liminality, multiplicity, or flexibility. Both discourses inform the ways in which we understand identity classification, both as something individual and interactional, and particularly for how we understand those at the intersections of multiple classifications. In this sense, I use these specific instances of the hyphenated identity, including an analysis of interviews with thirty name hyphenators, to reveal the cultural politics of ambiguity: how the concept of ambiguity not only emerges as a significant characteristic of hyphenated identities, but more importantly, how its tension with the more rigid landscape of the politics of identity becomes the driving force behind the contested readings of hyphenation.

Although previous attention to hyphenation has not looked at how these discourses play out similarly within national identity and surname identity, a specific interest in ambiguity has been at the forefront of various scholarly fields. Other social theorists, including Donald Levine (1985), Zygmunt Bauman (1991), and Eviatar Zerubavel (1991), as well as postcolonial theorists like Jonathan Rutherford (1990), Homi Bhabha (1994), Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (1997), and “border” theorists like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) have all considered some articulation of the ambiguous within social life. Despite the differences either in the contexts they attend to, or in the

ways in which they frame the ambiguous – as “queer” (Gamson 1995), “both/neither” (Roen 2001), “hybrid” (Werbner 1997), “difference” (Rutherford 1990), “undecidable” (Bauman 1991), “third” (Bhabha 1994), “liminal” (Turner 1967:7), “fuzzy” (Zerubavel 1991, 1997) or “mestizaje” (Anzaldúa 1987) – these theorists have all underscored the tension between “rigid” identity demands and more “flexible” styles of understanding identity (Zerubavel 1991).

It is a similar tension that emerges in considerations of hyphenation. In both settings of Hyphenated Americanism and surname hyphenation, cultural battles over hyphenation seem to highlight a complex interplay between these classification styles and the discourses that enact them. And it is this interplay, along with the “between” nature of the hyphen, that has heightened an understanding of hyphenation as “radically ambivalent” (Hussain 1989:10). In fact, such an understanding is what leads some social actors to self-consciously enact a hyphenated identity label as a way to “do ambivalence” (Sarkisian 2006); that is, to express contradiction, paradox, or irreconcilability. And it is also this sense of ambivalence that makes the hyphenated identity so often associated with ambiguity – the fact that the hyphen “refuses to settle down” (Trinh 1991:159) creates a significant problem for the rigid demands of classification.

I use ambiguity here primarily to mean uncertainty, undecidability, unreadability, indeterminacy, or even simply lack of clarity (Sarkisian 2006). Ambiguous boundaries, for example, may be those that are completely unintelligible – in Zerubavel’s (1991) terms “fuzzy” – or the boundaries may be intelligible, yet shifting or changing– what Zerubavel (1991) would call “flexible.” While ambiguity might be best understood as related to the external, as a condition of the group or of social reality in general,

ambivalence might be best understood as related to the internal, as a condition of the individual actor. And whereas ambivalence has often been conceptualized as related to the state of the subject, framed at a more individual or psychological level, I understand ambiguity as a more objective state, framed at the social structural or sociological level – for example, as in the case of social statuses and social relations “objectified in institutional structures” (Levine 1985:201). Given this, I use ambiguity as it relates to what Matthias Junge terms the “classificatory order” – “knowledge, cognitive classifications, and patterns of orientations for action” – while I use ambivalence on the other hand, as it relates to a kind of “action order” – actual behavior and experience (2008:50-52), as in the case of “doing” ambivalence (Sarkisian 2006).

My intention in distinguishing these terms is not to reify or essentialize them. In fact, although I agree with Ingrid Arnet Connidis and Julie Ann McMullin (2002) in their emphasis on the relationship between the classificatory realm and subjective action and their reframing of traditional understandings of ambivalence as that which is always already sociological, I distinguish these terms to emphasize that even if they are as Bauman (1991) suggests, simply “two sides of the same phenomenon” (Junge 2008:52), they are not necessarily the same thing, nor do they always operate at the same social level. This is not to say that ambivalence and ambiguity do not interact. In fact, it is their interaction that is the main focus here and distinguishing between them makes this interaction, as well as the interaction of the psychological and the social structural, more visible.

Certainly, subjective level ambivalence, typically expressed psychologically through emotions, motivations, and cognitions, are linked to “countervailing [structural]



expectations about how individuals should act” (Connidis and McMullin 2002), particularly the ways in which individuals negotiate self-understandings and social relationships (statuses and roles) with structural arrangements, including classificatory schemas, that have a constraining effect. Such social-structural schemas, and the counterschemas of individual experience, are in Levine’s words, “compresent” (1985:10). In other words, although “the individual experience of clashing sentiments” is real, as a social actor, the individual “cannot be reduced only to psychological states and feelings” (Connidis and McMullin 2002:561). Instead, in Robert Merton and Elinor Barber’s sociological view, this means that ambivalence results from contradictory demands that are placed upon “occupants of a status *in a particular relation*” (1963:96, emphasis added) rather than from the psychological state of the individual. Ambivalence thus results when “social structural arrangements collide with individual attempts to exercise agency when negotiating relationships” (Connidis and McMullin 2002:565).

Understanding the interaction between ambivalence and ambiguity is useful here. Traditional understandings of ambivalence tend to presuppose that these structural arrangements or classificatory schemas, including those that organize social relationships, are unambiguous in the first place. Yet ambivalence may also be a response to structural and classificatory ambiguity, resulting when individual attempts to understand, reconcile, or know the social world (and the relationships within that world) are disrupted by “social realities that are largely *indeterminate*” (Levine 1985:10, emphasis in original). In other words, ambivalence does not necessarily depend on one’s collision with *known* social realities, it can result when the uncertainty of those realities limits one’s ability to

negotiate or sort out social and structural relationships. Simply put, ambiguity can lead to ambivalence (Boss 1999).

In a similar vein, ambivalence can also create a sense of ambiguity. For example, the collision between social structural arrangements and individual action may locate the subject in what Victor Turner refers to as “structurally indefinable” positions (1967:6). On one level, ambivalence may simply be understood as a “kind of ambiguity that can exist *within* a given person (Sarkisian 2006:805, emphasis in original), but on another level, it can position social actors in structurally intermediate or ambiguous social locations. And this may also result in uncertainty within relationships. As Kurt Lüscher suggests, ambivalence is “embedded in the very processes of thinking, feeling, doing, relating and organizing,” and thus, is something that must be “dealt with” (2004:36). Social actors must ultimately cope with ambivalence, which requires agency (Lüscher 2004:37) and by extension, an awareness of identity, individual or collective. Seeing ambivalence in this way focuses heavily on the role of actors in negotiating and managing ambivalence and regardless of whether the ambivalence is turned primarily toward the self or emerges within relationships, such a view highlights the “human potential for action in social structure” (Lüscher 2004:36).

But this does not mean that social actors necessarily resolve their ambivalence. In fact, it is just the opposite. According to Lüscher, unlike “conflicts,” which have similar tensions and opposing interests and which may be resolved through mutual agreement or even force, the “basic tension” in ambivalence remains (2004:35). So, for example, as in the case of name hyphenators, their specific concerns and deliberations should not be seen as necessarily resolved through hyphenation – hyphenating is not a mechanism

through which they move from an ambivalent state to an unambivalent one. Rather, hyphenation is the mechanism through which hyphenators can allow for their conflicting interests, for that which might be “temporarily or permanently irreconcilable” (Lüscher 2004:36). As a result, ambivalence can be a highly unstable phenomenon (Brown 2001:85) and this can create contradictions and even uncertainty within relationships, which has traditionally been thought to create “troubled relationships” (Boss 1999:65). Of course, this does always have to be the case. Those who tend to more comfortably “do” ambivalence, for example, seem to be better able to endure uncertainty. That is, to use Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s (1949) concept, they have a greater “tolerance for ambiguity.”

Ultimately, how we come to understand and relate to ambiguity and by extension, those who are structurally ambiguous, has much to do with the extent to which we organize classificatory schemas as part of a “rigid” cultural logic, based on an often obsessively purist either/or vision of the social world, or as part of a more “flexible” cultural logic, based on a more “elastic” both/and vision of the social world (Zerubavel 1991:122). Such cultural logics provide “cognitive maps” (Zerubavel 1997:22) for not only how we might understand identity classifications and the boundaries that distinguish them, but also for how we might understand those located structurally “betwixt and between” classifications (Turner 1967). In the case of the hyphenated identity, for example, I call attention to how these logics play out in disputes between two ideological camps: *hyphenators*, whose “mental mobility” (Zerubavel 1991:121) tends to make them more comfortable with the both/and quality of hyphenation, and *hyphen-haters*, whose commitment to rigid either/or structures and pure categories leads them to reject and even

fear the hyphen and its associated ambiguity. Within rigidly conceived classification systems, on which hyphen-haters rely, those who fall into “twilight,” “intermediate,” or “ambiguous” (Zerubavel 1991) structural positions often provoke anxiety and are seen as impure, disordered, and particularly dangerous. And it is this anxiety that often directs hyphen-haters in their attempts to *disambiguate* identity boundaries; that is, to remove all uncertainty (and anxiety) by making boundaries clear and unquestionable – unhyphenated and unhyphenable – and thereby resolving any “problems” or potential problems of classification.

Even though I use the term hyphenator to most often refer to those with hyphenated surnames, I also understand and use the term to apply to ethnic hyphenators as well. This is despite the fact that both scholarly and autobiographical renderings of ethnic hyphenation dispute the extent to which ethnics – even those who positively self-identify as hyphenated – actually choose to be hyphenators or have that signification pressed upon them (Steiner 1916; Visweswaran 1994; Tamburri 1997; Sirin and Fine 2007). It is more often the case (though not always) that surname hyphenators are active hyphenators deliberately choosing hyphenation (even those given a hyphenated name at birth can at least choose not to use it); whereas, the labeling of Hyphenated Americans has historically been part of a process of assimilation and cultural normalizing that has not always been voluntary. In other words, the extent to which immigrants are active agents in their hyphenated construction is unclear. Thus, my purpose in using these terms is primarily analytical and I also do not mean to suggest that there are only two types of (mutually exclusive) actors at play within these contexts. In fact, certainly there are some social actors who may not themselves be hyphenators (in either context), yet may respond

sympathetically, even positively, to hyphenation. Likewise, hyphenators might also at times be hyphen-haters, as evidenced by both surname hyphenators and self-identified Hyphenated Americans who express a contested sense of their hyphenation.

It is also important to point out that “hyphenators” includes both collective hyphenators, who understand themselves as part of a group identity (most often in the case of ethnic-national hyphenation), and hyphenators who behave as individual actors (most often in the case of surname hyphenation). Yet such a collective/individual distinction is not always clear-cut within the contexts, particularly because surname hyphenators, in addition to their personal claims to hyphenating, often point out an understanding of themselves as part of a collective group of hyphenators, an imagined connection to others who hyphenate their names and one they often note as distinctly different from single-name groups that either change or retain their birth names. Likewise, name hyphenators also articulate a distinct understanding of hyphenation that takes both community and individual concerns into consideration. Despite any potential differences between collective or individual hyphenators, however, both types of actors similarly approach the hyphen with more flexibility, tolerance, and comfort than their hyphen-hating counterparts and moreover, they are often similarly confronted by hyphen-haters whose beliefs rely more on traditional and fixed notions of identity.

In this sense, the goal of this project is not to produce a seamless investigation of the development of hyphenation or even of the hyphenated identity. Instead, I intend to read ambivalence and ambiguity in the intellectual discursive history surrounding the use of the hyphen and I use the hyphenated identity as an entry point toward an analysis of the politics of identity classification, as well as the rigid and flexible cognitive

frameworks that inform them. What follows then, is as much a playbook of the tension between either/or and both/and classifications of identity as it is a way of redirecting disciplinary discussions of hyphenation as not only sociologically relevant, but as also *requiring* sociological attention. Toward this end, my analysis slides between the theoretical and the empirical. That is, “working the methodological hyphen” (Sirin and Fine 2008:200).

### **The Hyphenated Identity**

Although there are arguably more identities that are “hyphenated” than just the two settings I deal with here, my focus on these particular identities results from the observation that they are perhaps the most contested. If we consider Jennifer DeVere Brody’s (2008) notion that punctuation can “speak,” then the “voice” of hyphenation is certainly much more powerful within these identity contexts than in others. For example, the concept of the “writer-producer,” though hyphenated, is not a significant player in cultural politics. Following Gertrude Stein ([1935] 2004), not all punctuation is interesting, nor are all hyphens, nor are all identities. In part, this may be because some contexts are more ideologically charged than others, as in the case of the identities I look at here, related to ethnic and national identity in the case of the Hyphenated American and related to family, marital, and gender identity in the case of surname hyphenation. Certainly national identity and gender identity have both been highly scrutinized categories, even without the hyphen. Yet, the hyphenated-ness of the identities has drawn them into a debate that is very much about the (perceived) cultural performance of the hyphen and its relationship to American moral and political ideals. For the Hyphenated

American and the surname hyphenator, the “aesthetic form plays out in political critique” (Brody 2008:16).

Although the normative foundations that fuel such critiques, such as the perceived essential differences among racial or ethno-national categories or those between the family and marital status of men and women, may be present in these contexts to begin with, debates around the hyphen expose the extent to which national and family statuses must remain unambiguous for a sense of social order as well as the extent to which the hyphen is seen as disrupting that order. I contend that cultural anxieties about categorical impurity, ambivalence, and disorder are projected onto the hyphen precisely because the hyphen is perceived as an articulation of those things. Yet not all hyphenated categories provoke the same anxiety. Despite our overall cognitive need to compartmentalize, “mark,” and “order” reality in general (Berger and Luckmann 1966:21; Zerubavel 1991:2), some categories and the contexts in which they are situated are in fact more socially marked than others (Brekhus 1998:35). Being a writer-producer, for example, is not as cognitively or morally complex because not only is the social context in which these categories emerge relatively unmarked, but the categories “writer” and “producer” themselves are also unmarked; that is, not as “politically salient” (Brekhus 1998:34). In other words, there is less cultural investment in keeping the boundaries between those categories intact (and unhyphenated).

When the hyphen is operationalized within social contexts that have been “politically noticed,” however (Brekhus 1998:34), as national identity and family identity have, the disruption of purity, clarity, and unity is patrolled much more heavily – because not only is much more perceived as being at stake, but also because the clarity of these

identities is seen as much more critical for maintaining a particular moral and social order. The hyphenation of such categories “actively highlights” (Brekhus 1998:35) their difference and even resistance to this social order, likening the entire hyphenated label to a specialized form distinguished from that which is perceived as the “generic” or the “typical” (Brekhus 1998:35). In other words, the label Italian-American is distinguished from the typical form of “American” and likewise, surname hyphenation is distinguished from typical forms in which only one surname is used, typically the husband’s within marital naming or the father’s for children’s naming. The result is not just a linguistic contrast. It is a specifically moral and social contrast, and one that makes hyphenated forms and “typical” forms cognitively and culturally asymmetrical. (Of course, national identity and surname identity come to be marked contexts not simply because categorical contrasts – or deviations from the typical – exist, but also because the social field in which these contrasts are evaluated tends to be based on an overly rigid understanding of these identities and what is typical in the first place. It might be true, for example, that national identity in the United States would be far less contested if no other identity categories besides “American” were operationalized, but it would also be less contested if there was a more flexible understanding of what it means to be American).

My intention, of course, is not to ignore the uniqueness of these identity categories and settings, nor deny any context-specific understandings of hyphenation. Instead, my goal in generalizing is to expose how the cultural politics of ambiguity play out similarly in relation to the identity demands of both. In addition, although I often refer to the hyphenated identity as a *category* of identity, I do not take a categorical approach. I understand identity here more along the lines of *narrative* identity (Somers



1994), which like *social* identity requires a “shift in analytic gaze away from the individual as the point of reference” (Moloney and Walker 2007:2), and the recognition that categories of identity are products of social forces, not always self constructed, and often emerging in context. Yet unlike social identity, the narrative dimension more thoroughly foregrounds the way in which identity is discursively shaped. Central to this is the idea that identities are constantly being produced through interactions among socially situated individuals and between individuals and the forces and structures that shape society, including symbolic systems like language, discourse, and even punctuation (Holmes 1997; Moloney and Walker 2007).

For the purposes of this project, I am concerned mostly with the extent to which constructions of identity might be discursively contingent. As Margaret Somers explains:

People construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that “experience” is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives (1994:614).

On the one hand, this emphasizes that people *are* active players in their self-understandings of identity. On the other hand, this social agency can no longer be understood as a “unitary status of individuation,” but as always already mediated by “contested, but patterned” relationships, structures, politics, and discourses. (Somers 1994:634). In other words, we “come to *be* who we *are*” through “social narratives *rarely of our own making*” (Somers 1994:606; emphasis in original). In particular, these cultural discourses and public narratives are not simply representational, but are also

epistemological and ontological – through them “we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world...and constitute our social identities” (Somers 1994:606).

Such an approach recognizes not only that one’s identity is always situated in the relationally negotiated tension between “what you think it is” and “what others think it is” (Nagel 1994), but this approach also suggests the importance of “emplotted stories” (Somers 1994:614), including the names and labels constructed by these stories, for how one understands oneself. In Mary Waters’ (1999) study of West Indian immigrants, for example, she observes that their overwhelming racialization as “black Americans” came to shape their own narratives of self-identity, despite the fact that they did not really understand themselves in that way. The racial construction of West Indian identities created an “ongoing negotiation between self and other identification” (Waters 1991:46) and began to shape the boundaries of self-labeling for West Indians living in America. It has often been the case that linguistic, cultural, and historical differences among those with origins in the Caribbean, Africa, or South America are reduced to a collective label “black” or even more problematically “African American.”

Similarly, Tom W. Smith (1992) draws attention to the way in which changing racial labels in the United States (Colored, Negro, Black, and African-American) have been significant in defining both group identities as well as individual identities, particularly the way in which they provide the terms and limits for how identity and belonging can be constructed. In this sense, language, specifically identity labels, can be a “sensitive register of transformations in cultural meaning” (Isaacson 1996:465). This applies as much to political disputes around what to call immigrants and so-called “people of color” as it does to cultural disputes over surnames and the ability to have

control over naming one's family identity (Smith 1992:512-13). In this sense, as George Eaton Simpson and J. Milton Yinger propose, such labels are not "simply innocent;" they can "prefigure and control experience to some degree" (1985:25), and this has often been connected to the maintenance of structures of advantage.

Of course, acknowledging that "labels matter" should not discount that role of social actors who engage with them. Drawing on J.L. Austin (1962), for example, we might understand the act of hyphenating (and the hyphenated labels that result) as something through which relationships, connections, and identities actually become constituted. That is, through hyphenation, social actors are actually producing their identities and the connections they associate with those identities. Like Austin's proposal that we can "do things with words," hyphenation may be a way of making things (identities) happen. In fact, the meaning of the hyphen and hyphenating arguably only exists somewhere between the context in which the hyphenating is situated and the act of hyphenating itself. This pushes a focus toward how we might use linguistic resources to produce different kinds of identities and their relational and cultural content – the way in which that content becomes "stylized" (Butler [1990] 1999). In Judith Butler's ([1990] 1999) examination of gender performativity, for example, masculinity and femininity are not traits, but are constituted by what we do, manufactured through a continuous set of acts within what Deborah Cameron refers to as a "rigid regulatory frame" – the norms that set limits on what is "possible, intelligible and appropriate" for these performances (1999:444). For Butler performativity is both linguistic and theatrical. It is linguistic in the sense that it produces effects and consequences through language and linguistic convention. It is theatrical in the sense that it involves doing, presenting to an audience,

and is available for interpretation (Butler [1990] 1999:xxv). In extending this to family belonging, for example, we might understand kinship (as well as professional identity, ethnic identity, etc.) in similar terms, not as a given but as something that must be performatively constituted, constantly (re)affirmed, and put on display, in this case through the linguistic convention of hyphenation.

Of course, as Butler also points out, notions of linguistic convention should not mask the fact that individuals are active producers/performers who must first be aware of the meanings attached to identities and roles in order to reaffirm, transgress, or subvert them ([1990]1999:187). After all, such conventions are created by social actors in the first place. While there is a powerful cognitive need to delimit and label experience – for without these labels and the “mental fencing” they provide, we would not be able to “see” or understand social reality in any meaningful way (Zerubavel 1991:2) – this does not mean that the way in which we carve up reality remains uncontested. In this sense, focusing on disputes over labeling can help us recognize the way in which individual accomplishments of identity are intertwined with or even can be in tension with discursive, cultural, and political processes.

As this suggests, although they may be treated as such, identities are never “pre-political” (Somers 1994). I understand “politics” broadly here, not so much in the sense of political forms or political results, but rather how identity negotiations, constructions, and labels are themselves always already politically situated. The act of negotiation, in Homi Bhabha’s understanding, “is what politics is all about” (1990:216) and quite poignantly, Bhabha rejects the very idea of a “society prior to politics” (1990:220). Thus, my attention here is the way in which knowledge, identities, interests, social positions,

cultural values or even cultural symbols, like labels and marks of punctuation, can be performative acts and therefore part of a complex, at times asymmetrical, political process (Visweswaran 1994; Werbner 1997). This includes visions for how identities and social relations should be organized (Alexander 2006:57), the way in which classifications of these can be related to power and moreover, how some forms of classification are subverted and suppressed to maintain social order and the status quo. This is particularly true in cases in which hyphenated labels are assigned to those who “have little choice about the political processes” (Visweswaran 1994:132) determining “hyphen formation” (1994:116), such as the experience of hyphenated immigrants, for example, whose “hyphen” was often imposed on them by political claims-makers seeking to refine American identity (Philogène 2007). Likewise, self-understandings of what it means to have a hyphen “in” one’s name must often be reconciled with normative perceptions and conventions that scrutinize the legitimacy of a surname hyphenator’s family belonging. Of course, this begs the question of the extent to which these labels are self-identifications or are imposed by “powerful others” (Brubaker 2009:26), as well as the larger social consequences of labeling imperialism.

The uncertainty of this construction is important to understand because it requires a reading of the hyphenated identity within these contexts and of the hyphen as a punctuation mark as both figurative and literal. Perceiving surnames as “hyphenated,” for example, requires the presence and visibility of the hyphen. Simply put, a surname without a hyphen is not a hyphenated surname. When it comes to the Hyphenated American, however, the *concept* of hyphenation may transcend *actual* hyphenation. In other words, the “Hyphenated” American is itself a socio-political concept that can stand

alone, even without the literal hyphenation of categories. Hyphenation in this sense comes to have figurative meaning and a cultural legacy beyond its functional presence (Lang 2005). This is why, for instance, the concept of the Hyphenated American can remain so pervasive even as actual hyphenation, as a stylistic technique, ceases to be used in some immigrant identities. To use a phrase that I will discuss later, the Hyphenated American at least “retains the imaginary” of the hyphen (Visweswaran 1994:116). Of course, the mark of the hyphen and its grammatical rendering certainly play a role in the construction of this meaning, yet it becomes clear that its conceptual performance extends beyond its grammatical use. In fact, it is particularly telling that in some cases the concept of hyphenation becomes more powerful than any actual hyphenation

### **The Socio-Politics of Punctuation: Marks and Remarks**

The cultural deployment of the “hyphenated identity” is very much connected to American cultural narratives of belonging and it is an American context in which the use of this hyphenated signifier has most often been contested. Likewise, even as a matter of grammar, the hyphen has taken a different shape in the United States than, for example, Great Britain. Such a statement is not intended to essentialize either culture and certainly uses of the hyphen or hyphenated identities within Great Britain or the United States have not been universal. Yet, as many have argued, national differences may very well be at the heart of understanding the cultural politics of hyphenation (Partridge [1953] 1977; Brody 2008). In the United States in particular, hyphens not only become cast “as the tension between assimilation and difference,” but they are also cast as the tension between that which is unified or divided, as both “aesthetic and political” ideals (Brody

2008:89). In Eric Partridge's ([1953] 1977) estimation, it is the American cultural tendency toward solidity and unity that has fueled a tendency toward the discarding of hyphens. Partridge, like Brody, does not distinguish between the "hyphen" as a grammatical object and the "Hyphen" as a cultural one. This is perhaps intentional. Although the cultural Hyphen becomes charged with a specific political and ideological biography, in many ways its cultural significance is deeply embedded in matters of grammar and vice versa. As Brody contends, grammatical debates over the hyphen, which involve notions of clarity and continuity, are not unlike extragrammatical debates over the Hyphen, which involve cultural values like integration and integrity and what she calls, an "American obsession with unification" (2008:90). In other words, writings on "proper" American grammar often favor assimilationist values, not unlike the assimilationist values of "good" Americanism expressed in United States cultural and political narratives. Such ideological biases can be found in Strunk and White's (2005) assessment of language, for example, in which they note a preference toward union: for two words to become one, usually after a period of hyphenation. In a similar vein, this preference has been evidenced in American national discourses, particularly those that encourage the dropping of ethnic-national hyphenations as necessary not just for cultural integration, but also for proving allegiance and loyalty. In both cases, grammatical and cultural, hyphens disrupt moral precepts about what is proper and good (conflated with the concept of union), and therefore, should never be anything more than temporary, ultimately disappearing (Brody 2008:89-90).

It is certainly not possible to determine the extent to which hyphenation acts as a cultural object, and although my intention is not to mythologize the relevance of

hyphenation or of grammar in general, I do agree with Berel Lang's (1991) observation that stylistic norms in grammar and writing can be deeply connected to cultural and moral norms. In a similar vein, as Brody (2008) points out, punctuation *remarks* as much as it marks. When it comes to the hyphen, part of this "remarking" and the way in which it becomes translated in cultural terms is related to its perceived structural ambiguity. In fact, the hyphen's relationship to the ambiguous seems to have historical foundations in its development as a linguistic sign, particularly the way in which it was used to contend with the spatial ambiguity of words. Thought to have developed from the Greek, literally meaning "together" (Teall 1937; Partridge [1953] 1977:134), various forms of the hyphen can be traced back to the seventh century (Saenger 1997). Although what we term a hyphen was not more regularly used until the central Middle Ages, such earlier uses appeared specifically after the historical introduction of spaces between words. In fact, as Paul Saenger (1997) suggests, it is the evolution of reading, predicated upon the spatial organization of words, which created a linguistic system in which the hyphen could be imagined in the first place. That is, it is not until the space becomes used as an inter-word boundary that the hyphen becomes conceptually possible. Prior to the seventh century words were typically written continuously and unseparated, in the graphic tradition of *scriptura continua*, which made oral reading necessary for comprehension. As Saenger proposes, however, the introduction of the inter-word space enhanced the cognitive awareness of words as discrete units, orienting reading towards morphemes rather than phonemes (1997:66). Not only did separated script provide a broader field of vision, but it also changed the cognitive skills needed for deciphering meaning from the text. Thus, as the space became codified, the hyphen emerged as a way to contend with this "new"



graphic organization of words, used particularly when the spacing between words was uncertain or ambiguous. In this sense, the hyphen has had a long-standing relationship to ambiguity, with its presence historically tied to spatial ambiguity.

Likewise, even in more contemporary uses of the hyphen, grammarians have noted that they can be *internally* ambiguous, functioning in such contradictory ways that they have proven resistant to the rational design of grammar. For example, the “same” hyphen can actually be used to denote multiple meanings, sometimes denoting an antagonistic categorical relationship, as in the case of “Hatfield-McCoy,” while at other times denoting an attempt to “build bridges” between categories, as in the case of “Marxist-Feminist” (Petchesky 1979:375). While there is clearly no qualitative difference in the way the hyphen textually occupies the space between various categories, the relationship it creates between the categories does vary. In this sense, hyphens can be multivocal signifiers and are often “migratory” (Brody 2008:85), moving in and out of phrases and not always performing in the same way – sometimes dividing, while other times uniting (Partridge [1953] 1977:134). Hyphens can connect words together, join syllables separated at the end of the line, and even denote tension between words (Germana 2007). And this has made grammarians profoundly ambivalent about the correct use of hyphens, with their presence or absence tied inconsistently to cultural location, shifts in history, word frequency, and even aesthetics. With such ambiguous tendencies, it conveys a fluid, even fuzzy dynamic, a slippery slope of both function and meaning (Zerubavel 1991). Such perceived ambiguity, “appearing and disappearing seemingly without fixed rules” (Brody 2008:85), is precisely what makes the hyphen so perplexing. After all, it is the goal of punctuation (and the task of style manuals) to

eliminate the arbitrary and “subjective element” (The Chicago Manual of Style 2010) from writing in favor of clarity, consistency, and ease. The linguistic flexibility of the hyphen, however, has resisted being rigidified and regulated and has thus has fueled a kind of grammatical – and cultural – neurosis.

Generally speaking then, because of the ambiguity surrounding the function of the hyphen, hyphenating as a grammatical practice has often been resolved by some style manuals as a “matter of whim...little short of chaotic” (Teall 1937:39). This does not mean, however, that the hyphen or hyphenating is purposeless or meaningless. In interpreting “twenty-one night stands” or “twenty one-night stands” (Brody 2008:86), for example, the hyphen certainly has a clarifying effect. In fact, this speaks to the hyphen’s metacommunicative role (Bateson [1955] 2005:188), providing the metamessage “these words are more related than the other words” and ultimately shaping their interpretive direction. In addition, as many grammarians have noted, use of the hyphen also often signals intermediate word-forms, compressing the meaning of words, highlighting new significations, and even sometimes enhancing the descriptive potential for writers, as in the case of Faulkner’s description in *Pylon* of “whiskey-and-ginreeking, bayou-and-swampsuspired air” (McGrath 2007). Likewise, writers and poets like Shakespeare, Milton, and Donne also drew upon the hyphen for its expressive value (McGrath 2007). It is in fact the linguistic flexibility of the hyphen that has made it so appealing as a literary artifact. Yet this same flexibility has also meant that it is seen as a complication to the more rigid tendencies of grammatical structure, with its use often attributed to more arbitrary impulses like instinct or personal style. When considering whether to use the hyphen, grammarian Edward Teall acknowledges this in his interestingly titled *Meet Mr.*

*Hyphen and Put Him in His Place*, “Mr. Hyphen is a good fellow, but he has to be watched” (1937:57).

Of course, grammatical devices and style do not exist on their own nor are they independent of cultural influences. One need only look at the elimination of over 16,000 hyphens in the most recent edition of the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, which effectively redesigned grammatical “sense and sensibility” with regard to hyphenating (Brody 2008:6). Grammatical gatekeepers like dictionaries, publishing houses, style guides, and copy editors, are ultimately tasked with standardizing or setting the boundaries for the best and proper use of hyphens, which as Brody points out, has the effect of marking “national, educational, and class status” (2008:22). Drawing on Derrida, Brody even goes as far as to say that such standardizing is “a party-line, a grammatology of the state” (2008:21) which, given state discourse about Hyphenated Americanism as well as the role of the state in regulating hyphenated names, takes on an even more significant meaning. Grammar and language not only become forms of cultural capital, with grammatical gatekeepers patrolling the boundaries of its good use, but cultural preferences and attitudes also shape the direction of grammatical practice. This has been particularly true in American cultural politics, in which the cultural importance of “one-ness,” “solidity,” and “unity,” seems to fuel an impulse toward eliminating the hyphen – and its ambiguous tendencies. When it comes to the hyphen, grammar and cultural predilections collide.

*One Nation, Unhyphenated*

As I noted earlier, Great Britain provides an interesting contrast to American responses toward hyphenation. Hyphens are not only multivocal in what they communicate grammatically, but they are also multivocal cross-culturally; that is, how they are understood socio-politically often depends on cultural context. In fact, using the same line within the same context (naming) has meant something very different depending on whether you are in Great Britain or the United States. Unlike the American emergence of hyphenated naming as a reaction against marital customs that require women to change their names, the British use of hyphenation by contrast, primarily emerged within naming as a way to denote class privilege and family status, and most particularly to preserve and clarify rights of inheritance. Moreover, the British use of the hyphen to create “double-barreled” and even “multi-barreled” family names (Bowlby 2009) seems to suggest that hyphenation and its implications of ambiguity and ambivalence need not be inevitable nor problematic. In the United States, on the other hand, the cultural response to hyphenation has typically been unfavorable, which has seemed to result from an American propensity for essential, undivided, and unambiguous social relationships. As Partridge suggests, Americans not only use less hyphens than do the British, but this national difference is driven by a specifically American cultural emphasis on unity and solidity, which “merely accords with the general tenor” of American life ([1953] 1977:138). That is, American cultural identity has been fundamentally shaped around the “spatial expression of a unitary people” (Bhabha 1999:212): out of many, one. Partridge further argues that the American “tendency [for hyphens to drop out] has accelerated since about 1914... ‘—why resist the inevitable’” ([1953] 1977:138)? Of course, it is the “inevitability” of unity and solidity, what Strunk

and White perceive as the “steady evolution of the language” toward union (2005:57), that the hyphen disrupts.

Such assimilationist renderings of grammar and style and the privileging of unity takes on an “official” tone in the *United States Printing Office Style Manual* (2008), which advocates a move toward “reduction” and “singularity.” In considering the use of the hyphen, the manual notes that “current language trends continue to point to *closing up* certain words which...have become fixed in the reader’s mind as *units of thought*. The tendency to *merge* two short words continues to be a *natural progression* toward *better* communication” (*United States Printing Office Style Manual* 2008:95; emphasis added). In the chapter that outlines “Compounding Rules,” the manual not only emphasizes “solid” forms, but also naturalizes the tendency toward “one,” which *dropping* the hyphen facilitates. If “better” communication is accomplished in the “closing up” of words, then it begs the question as to whether hyphenated forms must necessarily be conceived as “lacking and/or broken” (Brody 2008:91). In fact, the hyphen has often been discourses exactly in this way. For example, in response to the perceived internal ambiguity and migratory nature of the hyphen, attempts to standardize the practice of hyphenating have been perceived as “hopeless” and the hyphen itself as “chaotic” (Fowler and Fowler 1911). In a similar vein, Strunk and White went as far as to describe the hyphen as playing “tricks on the unwary” (2005:57) and more recently, the elimination of hyphens from the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* was explained by the dictionary’s editor as resulting from the “messiness” of the hyphen and the public’s overall lack of confidence in how to use it (McGrath 2007). (Noting the British

preference for hyphenation, one American journalist scolded the British dictionary: “it’s about time” [Clark 2007].)

Of course, this drive toward “closing up” and notions of hyphenation as tantamount to “trickery” are not simply about grammar. Punctuation for example, is both a “case of doing and a thing done” (Brody 2008:58), a performed gesture that can arrange and direct thought not just functionally, but can also provide what poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge calls “dramatic directions” for how we should react viscerally ([1809] 1997:423). And as Lang (1991) points out, discourse about the stylistic virtues of language and writing is not unlike the discourse on what constitutes the virtues of conduct. In other words, stylistic norms are connected to moral norms of behavior. According to Lang, the grammatical ideal that writing should be “unequivocal...without hedge or compromise” (1991:17) is as much a moral code as it is a stylistic one. In fact, Strunk and White explicitly make this connection: “The approach to style is by way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity...Muddiness is not merely a disturber of prose, it is also a destroyer of life, of hope” (1959:57, 65). Such extragrammatical concerns can certainly be seen in narratives that position the hyphen as messy, chaotic, and hopeless. And these concerns are perhaps even more telling in the “trickster discourse” (Fu 2008:172) surrounding the hyphen as well as in renderings of the hyphen as a “mimic” (Germana 2009) and even as a “wish” (Petchesky 1979:375) – all of which draw attention not only to the double-voiced nature of the hyphen, but also its duplicitous potential. (Interestingly, tricksters, mimics, and wishes have all often been used as literary devices for deception or warning. Tricksters in particular are also often characterized as liminal mythic creatures). This is something Teall clearly illustrates in

his personification of “*Mr. Hyphen*,” whose moral character is, incidentally, not to be trusted (1937:57). In the case of American style manuals, goals toward regulating good American grammar are analogous to the impulse of American identity politics toward good moral conduct and historically speaking, good Americanism. Good writing, like moral character, should not be “‘ambiguous,’ ‘fuzzy,’ ‘vague,’ ‘noncommittal,’ ‘irresolute’” (Lang 1991:17). In both cases, the cultural values invested in the concept of “good” are those that favor solidity, unity, order, and transparency.

In this way, discourses surrounding the hyphen reveal moral traditions not simply related to grammar, but also as deeply embedded in cultural politics. In other words, these cultural sentiments are in part what structure understandings of the hyphen. Additionally, such notions of solidity, singularity, and unity, in which “mixtures” and multiplicity are not tolerated, are often informed by a fundamentally purist, and overwhelmingly rigid, cultural logic (Zerubavel 1991). Consider, for example, the way in which such purist visions of reality play out in American approaches to ethnoracial identities. I prefer the use of “ethnoracial” here to problematize the conventional distinction between “ethnicity” and “race” (Patterson 1997; Lieberman and Waters 1988:14; Brubaker 2009:26; Zerubavel 2012:57). Historically it has been a white/black binary schema that has dominated perceptions of the American ethnoracial landscape and this has been supported by understandings of the racially distinct origins of blacks and whites “since the Creation” (Zerubavel 2012:100). It is the rigid rendering of these categories and deep concerns about racial purity that have been used to support clearly demarcated and asymmetrical social arrangements like the one-drop rule and anti-miscegenation laws as well as the fact that “we consider Barack Obama a black man with

a white mother rather than a white man with a black father” (Zerubavel 2012:3). As Zerubavel points out, drawing on Patrick Wolfe (2001), “By effectively considering anyone with black ancestors black, the one-drop rule thus ‘makes black unhyphenable’ since there is basically ‘no such category as anything-black people. There are only black people’” (2012:103). Interestingly, when President Obama identified himself as a “mutt,” however, “the very antithesis of the traditionally revered purebred” (Zerubavel 2012:85), he took aim at such purist renderings that might classify him as racially either/or as well as racially singular and unified, ultimately emphasizing his “betwixt and between” status. Of course, such ethnoracial liminality continues to be invisible in any official capacity in the United States. Prior to the year 2000, for example, the Census only allowed respondents to choose a single racial category, and although the current Census now permits the selection of multiple races, the government still does not recognize “multiracial” as an official classification (United States Census Bureau 2011). Despite the fact that a respondent can now self-identify with five or even six racial categories, the lack of a multiracial category, as well as the categorical separation of race and ethnicity, still continues to preserve the idea of distinct, neatly separated, and mutually exclusive categories. In this sense, complex and multilinear ethnoracial experiences (Zerubavel 2012:102) are ultimately rendered unhyphenable – “closed up” in favor of oneness and easily distinguishable “solid” forms.

Thus, Strunk and White’s evolutionary view takes on additional meaning. Inasmuch as the hyphen does not drop out, it resists a naturalistic imperative for how words, categories, and even the social order should (not) be “carved up” (Zerubavel 1991). Narratives that emphasize unity and solidity, whether framed as grammatical or



cultural ideals, are really statements about how rigidly we approach the social world, revealing “deep sentiments...toward the social order in general” (Zerubavel 1991:70). It has been this same rigid thinking that has driven nativist, imperialist, and assimilationist American attitudes, whether after the Civil War, at the portal of Ellis Island, in the rhetoric of the melting pot, in normative expectations of gender roles, or in systems of family naming (Brody 2008:90). The political and moral ideal of social cohesion applies as much to the space between words as it does to national borders and family belonging. In fact, such an emphasis on cohesion ultimately fuels an *assimilationist discourse* within national identity – or what Anzaldúa (1987) might understand as a discourse of “appropriation” – and a *community discourse* within family identity (Baxter 2010), both of which tend to be discursive correlates to the politics of identity, privileging and even naturalizing unity, sameness, integration, commonality, and universalism.

Of course, because notions of commonality and cohesion simultaneously make differences visible, they also tend to foreground those who “*fail* to hold something in common” (Vedery 1994:45, emphasis in original). Thus, assimilationist discourses are often constructed in opposition to discourses of *resistance*, while community discourses are often constructed in opposition to discourses of *individualism* (Baxter 2010). By emphasizing difference, independence, autonomy, and even a “refusal to fit in” (Roen 2001), discourses of resistance and individualism, which might be understood as discursive correlates to the politics of ambiguity, come to be the antithesis of cohesion and ultimately, of belonging. The expectation of “thought-sharing” (Ricento 2003) for instance, which is often part of assimilationist as well as community agendas becomes a way in which to assess this belonging, or as Katherine Vedery puts it, to reinforce a “first

order dichotomization of the social field” (1994:44). In other words, the discursive struggle between assimilation/resistance and community/individual, in which thought-sharing is but one metric, becomes a way to assess and reinforce us/them. “Sharing the same ‘ideas’” (Ricento 2003:617), whether about American national identity or family identity, is not only an indicator of cognitive unity, but it is also a moral statement about the purity of one’s loyalties, commitments, and intentions within the existing social order. And such a purist code applies as much to assessments of whether individuals are like-minded “enough” as it does to whether they have the “right” cultural practices, or even the “right amount of blood” (Williams 1989:429), as in the case of the one-drop rule, to claim a common identity. After all, although the one-drop rule may be extreme rendering of “Americans’ obsession with racial purity” (Zerubavel 2012:102), the same purist logic supports other “myths of homogeneity” (Williams 1989:429) like thought-sharing and the closing up of words, which like the one-drop rule leave no room for mixtures.

It is within these discourses that the socio-politics of hyphenation, as both mark of punctuation and identity label, plays out. Seen as representing “two (or more) vying traditions or allegiances” (Lang 2005:5), the hyphen becomes cast as the tension between solid and broken forms, assimilation and resistance, community and individual, and by extension, belonging and not belonging. In other words, the hyphen makes these divides less clear. The fact that hyphenation might signal “multiple meanings (and therefore ambiguity)” makes it a highly unstable classificatory structure (Zerubavel 1991:60) – chaotic and messy. Such instability not only calls attention to the “inadequacies of such structures,” but it also disrupts the “cognitive tranquility” of those who are committed to them, particularly those whose cognitive style privileges rigidity (Zerubavel 1991:34-35).

This often means that within rigid and/or purist systems, the hyphen has tended not only to be read as ambiguous, but has also tended to provoke significant anxiety. In fact, the anxiety expressed in the trickster discourse of grammatical debates becomes translated culturally as threat. In the case of Hyphenated Americans, for example, this anxiety has been dramatized as “threat to nation,” where Hyphenated Americans are impure, treasonous, and even sinful. For surname hyphenators, this is dramatized as “threat to family,” in which they are perceived as androgynous, untrustworthy, and questionably committed to their families. As Lang goes on to point out, the idea of threat that accompanies the hyphenated identity and the discursivization of its danger – to the extent that President Woodrow Wilson even referred to the hyphen as a dagger – acts as a “unifying motif” (2005:11). In other words, the possibility of harm (in this case as it is attached to the hyphen) can be used as a way to pathologize ambiguity, compel convention (Douglas 1966), and ultimately reestablish “confidence that behind the uncertainty the world is coherent” (Shepard 1978:76).

In this sense, dropping the hyphen becomes the “ultimate act of assimilation” (Golash-Boza 2006:30), an affirmation that one’s virtues are, like the virtues of grammar, unequivocal. Ultimately, the American cultural value placed on “closing up,” whether discursively framed as assimilation, community, or the natural evolution of language, makes being betwixt and between structurally impossible. That which is ambiguous, liminal, or a “mutt” is rendered unnatural, disordered, and even threat. Within this cultural schema, being “one nation” or “one family” means being unhyphenated. In this way, hyphenation is not only the antithesis to unity, but specifically calls into question rigid and purist assessments of belonging, whether related to national identity,

citizenship, family belonging, or even the roles of men and women and the essential differences thought to maintain them. When the hyphen does not drop out then, it exposes the social facticity of these schemas and the systems of classification upon which the social order rests – we are forced to recognize them as the “fictive, man-made, arbitrary creations that they are” (Douglas 1966:209).

### **Contextually Speaking**

In what follows, I move toward the data, briefly summarizing each context as well as providing a brief overview of my methodological approach to surname hyphenators. The methodological decision-making for this project began with interviewing name hyphenators and was largely exploratory. Because name hyphenators often make a self-conscious and intentional choice to hyphenate, they presented an optimal setting for my initial interest in how social actors attach meaning to the hyphen. In fact, the primary goal of the interviews was to isolate the practice of hyphenating not as a naming choice, but more generally: to see how the hyphen is read by those who use it, why social actors deliberately enacted it in their names, and the cognitive values they associated with it. The themes that emerged from these interviews set the foundation for the analysis that developed within this project. The decision to also include a reading of *Hyphenated Americanism* evolved from the observation of an overlap with many of the themes of the name interviews. Although approaches to the hyphen within surnames can sometimes be more subtle – unlike John Wayne’s ([1979] 2001) “Hyphen” poem about *Hyphenated Americanism*, I know of no famous poems written about surname hyphenation – there is often parallel treatment of the hyphen across both contexts, including its associations

with ambivalence, the way in which its both/and potential creates ambiguity of meaning and of belonging, its ability to provoke anxiety, and notions of it as threat. The conceptual similarity that emerges is a powerful suggestion that the cultural and political content of hyphenation (Somers 1994; Gatzouras 2002) is deeply embedded in struggles over classification and the cognitive styles that inform classification, what it means to draw lines around (or between) identities, and what happens when those lines create contradictions and uncertainties.

While on one hand attending to both these contexts provides a broader umbrella under which to theorize insights about the hyphen and how social actors have used it, it also does create differences for comparison, particularly the points of view from which the data is generated. For example, while the surname data clearly emerge from interviews, from the perspective of hyphenators themselves, my discussions around Hyphenated Americanism are largely historical and tend to lean toward the perspective of hyphen-haters. Although I do consider the perspectives of many autobiographical writings from self-identified ethnic hyphenators, particularly at the end of Chapter 3, my perhaps disproportionate attention to hyphen-hating sentiments is not an oversight, but rather an observation that the earliest first and secondary source references to Hyphenated Americanism were overwhelmingly negative. For example, Charles William Penrose's 1889 letter, one of the earliest printed documents to refer to Hyphenated Americanism, explicitly deems it as a "vice." And such negative renderings are also what have led some ethnic groups to eschew hyphenated labels, as in the case of resistance in the late 1980s to the label "African-American," which was leveled as perpetuating the "'hyphenated American' problem" (Smith 1992:509). At the same time, such negative impulses have

also sparked positive appropriations of hyphenation – new hyphenations – as in the case of the push away from Chinese-American, Japanese-American, or Korean-American and toward the label “Asian-American” to symbolize the bonds and even shared injustices among different Asian groups living in America (Lee 2003).

### *Hyphenated Americanism*

For the purposes of this research, I understand the Hyphenated American identity as historically the first culturally significant context in which the socio-politics of hyphenation play out. Although the exact definition of a Hyphenated American has certainly varied with historical and political circumstances, the phrase grew most popular during the so-called great wave of immigration to refer to the ethnic-national identities of first-generation European immigrants, including German-Americans, Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, and Polish-Americans. Not only do historical discourses seem to indicate that such hyphenation was operationalized as a cultural metaphor for patriotic ambivalence, but also that the hyphen itself was often used explicitly as a political communication toward particular nationalist goals. Although I spend the most time looking at the historical discourse of this period of Hyphenated Americanism, later understandings of the concept have come to signify first-, second-, and even third-generation African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Indian-Americans, even those born on American soil, while European immigrants, particularly second and third generation, are often no longer considered hyphenated. I talk more about this in Chapter 3, but such a shifting definition reveals the concept of hyphenation (and Americanism) clearly as a social rather than natural fact – “neither natural nor logical”

(Zerubavel 1997:44) – and deeply embedded in the cultural politics of the state (Starr 1992). Nonetheless, despite these shifts, one common feature of the term Hyphenated American is that it has historically been a referent for national identity and particularly in nativist discourses, a diluted national identity (Lang 2005).

It is important to make a distinction here between the “politics of citizenship,” as a matter of substantive membership, and the “politics of formal belonging” (Brubaker 2010:64). Even when there has been no ambiguity about the formal state membership or legal nationality of Hyphenated Americans, their informal membership, their “substantive acceptance as full members of a putatively national ‘society’” (Brubaker 2010:64-65), may still be contested. In other words, Hyphenated Americans can be citizens of the United States in a formal sense and yet still be perceived as hyphenated because their informal national membership (Brubaker 2010:65), or what Aihwa Ong (1996) calls cultural citizenship, is perceived as questionable. Such formal rights might be granted by the state, but informal criteria of inclusion (Alexander 2006:38; Nash 2010:132) can be just as powerful in determining whether one is assessed as a person who has a “right to have rights” (Arendt 1968:296). Meeting the legal requirements for citizen does not necessarily correspond to suprapolitical belonging (Alexander 2006:37). Following this idea of the cultural citizen then, national identity should be understood here as an “ideological field” (Ong 1996), standing at the intersections of territory and ancestry, immigrant and citizenship status, ethnoracial identity, and cultural competency. It is as much one’s own sense of belonging, on both an individual and collective level, as it is how that belonging is perceived by others in the political community.

As Thomas Ricento (2003) points out, the “nation” that informs this sense of identity is not so much an entity (Brubaker 2004:116) as it is a symbolic and discursive construct. In other words, as Benedict Anderson ([1983] 2006) notably contends, the “place” of the nation is an imagined one, ultimately distinguished from other nations only by the style of imagining that develops. In particular, it is the imaginative construction of a nation as a limited community, despite the fact that most of its members will never know each other, that gives rise to a “comradeship” or loyalty so intense that members would be willing to give their lives for their nation (Anderson [1983] 2006:7). Although there are different and even competing ways in which a nation comes to be imagined and certainly may be imagined differently by different people even in the same historical time (Brubaker 2004:122), the “imaginary complex” (Ricento 2003:617) that shapes the United States has at times and in certain settings taken a turn toward a “narrow Americanism” (Brubaker 2004:122). For Ricento (2003), who looks specifically at these discursive constructions, narrow renderings of comradeship come to be discursively constructed as cultural and cognitive unity. This is particularly true for how citizens are expected to relate to the nation: they are expected to think alike, have universal ideas, interests, and practices, and even “have Americanism in their hearts and souls” (Ricento 2003:631). In fact, like-mindedness is seen as so critical to American identity that it even becomes naturalized in narratives of “common origins” (Zerubavel 2012:47), particularly through attention to “founding texts” and “Pilgrim Fathers” (Ricento 2003). The perceived essence of American identity then, becomes discursively rooted in common forefathers, common soil, common language, and common mind.



On one hand, appeals to commonality and a national identity that transcends differences can be important rhetorical resources for nation-building. In fact, the political language of a common nationhood, including claims toward unity and solidarity, can be critical for inspiring feelings of responsibility, empathy, and inclusion for fellow citizens (Brubaker 2004:118). On the other hand, such claims tend to mask the fact that some social actors have historically been seen as less able to think alike and thus have either been involuntarily precluded from inclusion or have automatically required cultural conversion, an almost religious-like process of deep emotional and spiritual transformation (Ricento 2003:620). In the case of Hyphenated Americans, the “proselytization” (2003:620) of unity and common origins comes to mean “stamping out foreign characteristics” (Berkson [1920] 1969). And as Ricento (2003) seems to imply, this consensus view, whether thought-sharing or common origins, actually becomes a way to reinforce the ethnoracial exclusion, while at the same time avoiding an explicit framing of national membership in ethnoracial terms (see Zerubavel 2012:57-58). In other words, although Americanism becomes “constructed as a common national mental state in lieu of a common ethno state” (Ricento 2003:631), it nonetheless encompasses implicit ideologies about ethnicity, race, and nationhood.

And such ideologies are certainly embedded in concerns about the allegiances and political commitments of Hyphenated Americans, whose hyphens have historically been considered indications of foreign-mindedness rather than like-mindedness. In addition, the construction of Hyphenated Americans as diluted (Gilbert 1997), and thereby “watered down,” takes notions of unity and commonality to a different level. Notions of dilution are ultimately notions of impurity, since dilution as a concept only makes sense

through its contrast to that which is undiluted or that which is in its pure and original state. Diluted substances are those that are diminished, weakened, adulterated, and even “degraded” (Zerubavel 2012:110). In an extreme sense, this is similar to American historical classifications of black blood as inherently tainted and therefore as tainting the supposed superior quality of white blood, both biologically and morally. Yet even beyond notions of “blood essence,” which the one-drop rule implies, understandings of what it means to think alike and share common origins – the markers of legitimate, and undiluted, Americanism – are not just matters of unity, but come to be understood specifically in terms of purity and impurity. Thinking alike is as much thought-unity as it is thought-purity and it is such myths of unity and purity that come to construct the contrast between “*simply* Americans” (Zerubavel 2012:108, emphasis added) and *Hyphenated* American.

“Simply Americans” are not just like-minded, they are culturally and cognitively unadulterated. *Hyphenated* Americans, on the other hand, whose cultural citizenship remains in question, are more often perceived as cognitively dissimilar and culturally diluted. Yet the fact that Hyphenated Americans were also historically understood as able to be trained to drop their hyphens through civic, cultural, or moral education, also means that they were often perceived as ambivalently caught between cognitive similarity and dissimilarity, cultural purity and cultural dilution, American-mindedness and foreign-mindedness, and by extension, legitimacy and illegitimacy. They could potentially, if they eliminated the diluting tendencies of the hyphen, become “simply” American. Of course, my concern is not so much that the legitimacy of immigrants becomes questioned, but the way in which this legitimacy becomes punctuated. The point is not

that political ambiguity drives anxieties about immigrants, but also the way in which this political ambiguity gets put on display as hyphenated. As Brackette Williams argues, the starting point and subsequent valorizing of unity and purity (and the related suppression of ambiguity) begins not with some “objective point” of “real” purity or “authentic” common culture, but rather with “classificatory moments” (1989:429) of purification and authenticity, which mythmaking provides. And as she points out, “as nation builders, mythmakers become race-makers” (Williams 1989:430). In this context, mythmakers also become hyphen-makers (and hyphen-haters).

### *Surname Hyphenation*

The fact that the hyphen is used in something as fundamental to social life as surnames provides some indication of its perceived socio-political importance. Generally speaking, surnames have been regarded as highly relevant for identity, related to concepts of “individuality, equality, family, and community” (Augustine-Adams 1997:2). According to Avner Falk (1975), the answer to “What’s in a name?” is simply, “Identity.” Surnames not only locate a person within a family or a given history, but they have also been understood as packed with social values, providing a structure for how to understand social interactions: norms of address, legal rights and privileges, kinship ties, social status, sexual mores (boundaries of incest and the legitimacy of children), religious commitments, and ethnic differentiation and assimilation (Augustine-Adams 1997; Waters 1990). Considered a fundamental aspect of (contemporary Western) social identity – “we know of no people without names” – surnames provide a unique setting in

which the hyphen is sometimes deliberately used to shape identity, both at the level of self-definition and at the level of interaction (Calhoun 1994:9).

As related to identity, surnames or family names within the United States have had particular political significance for women. In fact, historically women could only achieve identity through their husband's surname (Stannard 1977:11) and it was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that women's names gained symbolic interest. During that time Elizabeth Cady Stanton was credited as one of the first women to equate names with identity:

“When a slave escapes from a Southern plantation, he at once takes a name as the first step in liberty – the first assertion of individual identity. A woman's dignity is equally involved in a life-long name, to mark her individuality” (1881:80). Of course, as Una Stannard (1977) points out, the link between surnames and (men's) identity has long been recognized, which as she continues, can be clearly deduced by men's significant aversion to changing their own names. Unlike the expectations of name changing for women, the stable nature of men's naming has very much been taken for granted. As a result, the relationship between surnames and men's identities has been much less studied.

In fact, most of the research that has been done on surnames, including demographic patterns, temporal trends, projected choices, and social perceptions, has primarily focused on women and specifically within heterosexual marriage (Brightman 1994; Johnson and Scheuble 1995; Twenge 1997b; Gooding and Kreider 2010). And it is this body of literature that has produced most of what we know about hyphenated names. Although not all hyphenated names result through marriage (e.g. children given hyphenated names, adults who use their parents' names to hyphenate, gay and lesbian non-married partners), nor are all surname hyphenators women, current research has

tended to focus on these areas. Evidence available on male name hyphenators, for example, has been largely anecdotal and their numbers are unknown (Forbes et al. 2002). In addition, current research has tended to view hyphenation within an either/or framework of “keeping” or “changing” one’s name, in which hyphenating has been viewed only as *one* of these processes (inconsistently as either keeping or changing).

This kind of either/or conceptualization signals my main point of departure from current surname research. Although such research has clearly emphasized the relationship between surnames and identity, it has not provided a comprehensive look at the distinct cultural performance of hyphenation – what I see as the way in which it can be used to “do ambivalence” (Sarkisian 2006). For hyphenators, such ambivalence might more accurately reflect their actual experiences of identity – the competing needs, desires, complexities, and cultural influences that continuously collide as they try to shape and structure a sense of self. With this in mind, the analysis that follows, which includes interviews with thirty name hyphenators, departs from previous research and approaches the hyphenation of surnames from both inside and outside the marital context; as fundamentally ambivalent; and as embedded in a political critique of cultural ambiguity. Moreover, this analysis suggests that previous research on hyphenated names has underemphasized and underestimated the degree of cognitive flexibility that hyphenators engage in. Not only do name hyphenators display ambivalence in their negotiations of their family identities, but many name hyphenators also self-consciously express understandings of hyphenation as a practical way to negotiate their conflicted feelings and obligations. Such a focus on hyphenation is not to suggest that other naming practices are somehow less indicative of one’s sense of identity. Certainly they are. *It is*

to say, however, that other naming practices are *far less ambivalent*. The hyphenated name is not only distinctly different from single name forms, but even naming practices that use two *unhyphenated* surnames simply do not display ambivalence in the way that hyphenated names do. After all, two unhyphenated surnames are still *treated* as single forms, with the “second” name standing in as the “last name.”

Because this population is a relatively small group – Joan Brightman (1994) estimates only about 5 percent of all married women hyphenate their names and this is significantly less for men – and because studies have shown that those with hyphenated names tend to know other name hyphenators, I depended on snowball sampling in addition to electronic and paper postings to recruit respondents. The selection criteria for how respondents came to have a hyphenated name was intentionally kept broad, to include not only the potential deliberations of those who *chose* a hyphenated name, but also to reflect the nuances and cognitive engagement required of those who did not choose it, yet nonetheless “live” with it, such as those given a hyphenated name at birth. The respondents included twenty-six women and four men, of which twenty-three were “marital hyphenators” who came to have a hyphenated name through marriage; four were given a hyphenated name by their parents at birth; and two hyphenated as adults with their parents’ names. One respondent was unmarried, yet hyphenated with her cohabiting partner’s name. Nearly two-thirds were over the age of 35. In addition, with the exception of the “children hyphenators,” whose parents gave them a hyphenated name at birth and who were pre-baccalaureate, respondents tended to be university-educated and nearly two-thirds had advanced degrees. In terms of ethnoracial identification, respondents were asked to name their own ethnoracial understanding of themselves and they were split

evenly between those who identified as white or Caucasian non-Hispanic (50 percent) and those who identified as black and/or reported their ancestry as Spain, Latin America, or Caribbean (50 percent).

Although this sample was not designed to be representative or generalizable, the demographic characteristics of participants did tend to be consistent with marital naming data from nationally representative samples. Such data consistently suggests that women with nonconventional surnames – which includes hyphenation, but also women who keep their birth names – tend to have higher levels of education, particularly advanced degrees, and also tend to be older when they marry than those with conventional names (Gooding and Kreider 2010). In addition, nonconventional surnames tend to be favored by women of color (Twenge 1997; Gooding and Kreider 2010); are more likely to be used by women with professional or management occupations; and are almost twice as likely to be used by women living in the Northeast or the West than in other areas of the United States (Gooding and Kreider 2010). To some extent, the similarities to marital naming data create analytic limitations for this project, particularly in the sense that the analysis inevitably leans toward the experiences of women and heterosexual married respondents. Yet, given that most name hyphenators at this point are concentrated within these categories, they are also the most significant stakeholders and have the most hand in shaping cultural scripts about hyphenation. One consequence of this that I do acknowledge, however, is that such a population may present a more limited (and more normative) view of how to define family and family life. Interestingly, despite the fact that some respondents more intentionally chose to hyphenate their names (i.e. those who hyphenated at marriage compared to those who were given hyphenated names at birth),

understandings of the “bothness” of hyphenation cut across all groups, regardless of their level of intentionality.

The one-to-two-hour interviews with participants took place either face-to-face or over the phone. Because I interviewed individuals with different experiences of hyphenation, the interview schedule itself took a guided or semi-structured approach. That is, the same general questions were asked, but the order and nature of some of the questions depended upon the experiences of the participants (e.g. participants may or may not be currently married/partnered; may or may not have children, etc). Drawing on Somers’s (1994) work on the narrative content of identity, this more flexible approach allowed respondents to speak to the situations that were most relevant to their “story” of hyphenation. Based on these “stories,” I then asked questions related to the decision-making processes surrounding their use of hyphenation, how the individuals made sense of having a hyphen “in” their name, and how they understood their hyphenation vis-à-vis relational others. The resulting analysis of the transcribed interviews was inspired by a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) as well as the theme-driven approach of social pattern analysis (Zerubavel 2007). Attending to the themes or patterns among interviews as well as between the contexts of surname hyphenation and Hyphenated Americanism allowed for an analytically rich view of ambivalence, its associated ambiguity, and the anxiety it provokes.

### **Looking Ahead**

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I expand on theoretical discussions related to the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity, as well as attention to their rigid and



fluid cognitive styles. I then give theoretical attention to how these cognitive styles help shape the parameters of classification, in ways that have social, political, and even moral consequences. With particular attention to the hyphenated identity, I consider how hyphenation might become situated at the intersection of these political agendas and cognitive styles, as moving in and between essentialist and deconstructionist frameworks, and toward what I understand as the unique quality of hyphenation. This not only enhances perceptions of the hyphenated identity as ambiguous, but perhaps more importantly, the ambiguity associated with the hyphenated identity has also tended to disrupt a cognitive sense of order and stability.

In Chapter 3, I highlight the context of Hyphenated Americanism and the discursivization of the hyphen within this setting. I begin by briefly revisiting assimilationist renderings of grammar and the American cultural drive toward clarity and unity have both produced a distinctly moral character of hyphenation. I use this moral significance to look at how the hyphenate (Brody 2008:86) has emerged within American national discourse as a category of ambiguous identity and moreover, how it becomes implicated in cultural narratives of purity and pollution, security and danger, and social order and disorder. I look at how the both/and status of Hyphenated Americans has resulted in a cultural response that I characterize as hyphen-hating, which not only relies on rigid and essentialist visions of identity, but also uses notions of anxiety and threat to confront and contain the perceived ambivalence of the hyphenated identity. In addition, I expand on my discussion from Chapter 2, suggesting that the hyphenated identity within this context can only be appropriately understood from within a “double discourse,” ultimately shaped by *both* the politics of identity *and* the politics of ambiguity. It is this

double discourse that has allowed the hyphenated American identity to become situated ambivalently in discourses of both assimilation and resistance – embraced by some, while rejected by others.

In Chapter 4, I provide an account of surname hyphenation as emerging in a similar cultural narrative to that of Hyphenated Americanism. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 30 name hyphenators, I take a closer look at ambiguity and ambivalence from the perspective of social actors living with hyphenated identities. In particular, I highlight how surname hyphenation, like Hyphenated Americanism, is situated in “vying traditions and allegiances” (Lang 2005:5), though for hyphenators this takes shape in discourses related to community and individualism. Surname hyphenators not only express a struggle between binary and hybrid understandings of identity – in this case regarding family roles and belonging – but they also use hyphenation distinctly as a way to “do ambivalence” (Sarkisian 2006). This chapter explores not only how respondents are situated in cultural narratives similarly related to the tension between the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity, including narratives of unity and purity, but also how surname hyphenators negotiate these narratives in interaction, with institutional forces, social systems, and other social actors. In this case, hyphen-hating takes a distinct shape in discourses that frame the hyphenator as “threat to family.”

Finally, in Chapter 5, my concluding chapter, I review the similar themes that emerge in both the contexts of Hyphenated Americanism and surname hyphenation and summarize the theoretical significance of the hyphenated identity. Ultimately, I look at the way in which meaning is derived through processes of ambivalence and its associated ambiguity as well as ways in which this meaning is simultaneously derived through

attempts to contain that ambiguity. As much as ambivalence and ambiguity can be tools toward opening up identity classifications, they can also be deployed toward reaffirming conventional categories. In this sense, the hyphenated identity presents a unique look at cognitive flexibility as theory and practice and the extent to which both/and conceptualizations of identity can only be read *at the intersection* of the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity.

## Chapter 2

### Identity, Ambiguity, and Flexibility

Understandings of hyphenated identities, particularly as they come to be read by hyphenators and hyphen-haters, might more accurately be considered statements about identity boundaries and the extent to which the boundaries of identity are perceived rigidly or flexibly (Zerubavel 1991). In particular, reactions to the hyphenation of identities have much to do with the way in which identity is conceptualized and operationalized and whether those conceptualizations allow for the presence of those who fall “beyond” or “in-between” classifications. In other words, how those conceptualizations treat ambiguity. Such reactions also highlight the way in which classification struggles and the cognitive frameworks that inform them can also be taken up in political agendas. This recognizes not only the *social* nature of classification, but also the *politics* of classification, or the way in which the logic of classification is immersed in political and cultural assumptions and often involves “cognitive battles” over categorical definitions and divisions (Zerubavel 1997). What is political, for example, is not only about what takes place in forms of government or even at the level of the state. In fact, attending to *cultural* politics, can foreground the debates and contestations of meaning across a variety of social settings, particularly how such contestation is often connected to attempts to maintain (or alternatively, disrupt) the normative order of things (Alexander 2006:399).

And such contestation is particularly true of identity classifications. As Paul Starr points out, while some classifications, like those of nature, are “one-way” classifications – “the plants are in no position to protest” (1992:269) – when it comes to social beings, however, the relationship between self-classifications and institutional classifications is much more dynamic and they sometimes collide. In Charles Taylor’s (1989) phenomenological terms, what distinguishes human beings as persons is their evaluative capacity, the qualitative assessments and positions with which they confront and interpret the world. Personhood requires reflexive awareness of normativity and moral standards, intersubjectivity and group belonging, making choices and having goals, as well as engaging in self-interpretations and narrative reflections of self. As evaluators and what Taylor calls respondents, those who are engaged in an active process of self-knowledge, human beings and their experiences can be quite different from the classificatory schemas that try to describe them (Taylor 1989:59) and this opens up the potential for tension.

These are important points, particularly in the recognition of the self as having social and moral agency, as well as having an evaluative tendency. I would add, however, that all classifications, even those imposed on the natural world, are political. That is, embedded in moral and cultural disputes over relations of power, inclusion and exclusion, what counts as legitimate, and the goals of interest groups. Yet, this analysis should not be mistaken as an analysis of power, at least not centrally. Instead, as Jeffery Alexander proposes, it is just as important to move beyond power, to attend to “shared feelings and symbolic commitments, to what people speak, think, and feel...to the ideas that people have in their heads and to what Toqueville called the habits of their hearts” (2006:43). And such habits extend into how we understand our family belonging and ethnic-national

affiliations as well as to understandings of grammar and punctuation and even the location of state lines and national borders. The cognitive and discursive traditions we rely on to understand these, the ways in which we classify, reveal not only how we make meaning in our lives, but also the normative dimensions of classification (Isaacson 1996:461; Zerubavel 1997:22). It is based on these normative dimensions that the natural world, like the social world, is expected to reflect “moral sense” (Alexander 2006:43), to fit within the “box” or risk being made invisible (Kuhn [1962] 1996:24).

In the discussion that follows, I consider the way in which understandings of identity have been politically theorized to fit within this “box,” both from the more essentialist perspective of the politics of identity and from the more deconstructionist perspective of the politics of ambiguity. In debates over hyphenation, for example, tensions between hyphenators and hyphen-haters are fundamentally similar to the tensions between deconstructionism and essentialism. In both discourses, cognitive disagreements shape the way in which identity can become part of a political project. In addition, using a specific cultural moment, that of the recent so-called “birthers” debate, I consider how these discourses are taken up in American cultural agendas that value assimilation and community, but also how the cultural politics of ambiguity and the related anxiety of ambiguity might also be used in the service of these identity-building agendas. Finally, I consider how hyphenation might represent a complex articulation of rigid and flexible classification styles that cannot be read as part of either the politics of identity or the politics of ambiguity alone. In other words, the hyphenated identity highlights a discursive overlap between the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity, even to the extent that hyphenation might enact both political agendas

simultaneously. Despite claims that hyphenation promotes a confusion of categories, it can at the same time also have rigid tendencies, fixing hyphenated terms in place. In this regard, hyphenation might be seen as hedging between these discourses and taking up a middle style of classification, that of flexibility.

### **Theorizing Identity: Either/Or and Both/Neither**

Perhaps not surprisingly, feminist and queer scholars have tended to explicitly consider the “in-between” as well as the social and political consequences that may result from those who “straddle the line.” As Diana Fuss (1989) along with Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (1991) suggest, the critical issue in debates over ambiguity and identity is politics. Such considerations have also brought theories of identity to the forefront, including perspectives on the politics of identity, an “ethnic/essentialist politic” that emphasizes the fixed, unitary, and community nature of identity (Seidman 1993:110; Gamson 1995:391), as well as perspectives on the politics of ambiguity, a “deconstructionist politic” that emphasizes the fluid, plural, and negotiable status of identity, even to the extent that it approaches the radical resistance of a “postidentity politic” (Seidman 1993:111). Rooted in a belief in “true essence” an essentialist politic understands identity as “irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person” (Fuss 1989:2). Such essentialist perspectives often privilege either/or and rigid understandings of identity, of “naming and valorizing particular constructions of group and individuals” (Epstein and Straub 1991:7), and then treating those constructions as “real,” homogenous, and rooted in the natural (Fuss 1989). Deconstructionist perspectives on the other hand, tend to privilege renderings of identity as both/neither,

fluid, or what Zerubavel calls “fuzzy” (1991:81), and as deeply embedded in the social. In fact, it has often been distinctions between natural/social, rigid/fuzzy, and either/or and both/neither positions that have most defined the differences between essentialism and deconstructionism. While essentialism sees the natural as a fixed “starting point” (Fuss 1989:3), as existing outside the social and therefore as that from which social practices emerge, deconstruction sees even the natural as historically and discursively created and therefore, capable of being shaped, reshaped, and even dismantled.

Although deconstructionist thinking has taken many forms – for instance, as “social construction” within sociology, “hybridity” within postcolonialism or multiculturalism, or even what might be considered a “protodeconstruction” within symbolic interactionism (Stein and Plummer 1994) – I favor the term “deconstruction” to summarize a broad spectrum of theories related to the disruption of identity boundaries. Deconstruction, like its constructionist counterpart, refutes the idea that identities are natural and fixed and instead locates them in social and historical processes. Likewise, deconstructionist perspectives privilege the heterogeneity and plurality of categories over the homogeneity and singularity entrenched in essentialism. But deconstruction, more so than constructionist thinking, has been particularly sensitive to the politics of ambiguity. Not only does a deconstructionist perspective seek to interrogate notions of essence, but it also supports the stripping, blurring, and destabilizing of identity categories. According to this line of thinking, “it is socially-produced binaries...that are the basis of oppression: fluid, unstable experiences of self become fixed primarily in the service of social control” (Gamson 1995:391). In particular, deconstructionists see these fixed and bounded identity categories as standing in the way of social and political change. Resisting oppression



then, requires blurring conventional boundaries and even tearing them down. While the more essentialist politics of identity frames categories as empirical and self-evident, the more deconstructionist politics of ambiguity favors the “politics of carnival, transgression, and parody” (Stein and Plummer 1994:182). The impulse toward discrete, clear, coherent, and rigidly defined classifications is countered by a recognition of categories and the boundaries around them as plural, unstable, blurry, and continuously negotiated (Werbner 1997:226).

Although much attention to deconstruction has emerged in relation to sexual, gender, or ethnoracial identities, a deconstructionist logic actually exposes the social facticity of *all* identities and questions their “unity, stability, viability, and political utility” in general (Gamson 1995:397). Whereas essentialist systems are fundamentally rooted in the “politics of polarity” (Bhabha 1994:56), dividing identities into either/or representations (male/female, straight/gay, white/black, American/foreigner), deconstruction sees binaries as distortions and in Katrina Roen’s (2001) terms, is much more likely to advocate a both/neither representation. Moreover, deconstruction underscores the difficulty of definition and the ways in which “identities are always on uncertain ground, entailing displacements of identification and knowing” (Stein and Plummer 1994:182). In many cases, individuals do not fit into any one identity and as Garber (1992) points out in her cultural analysis of transvestism, sometimes identities fall into what she simply terms a “third.” The cross-dresser, for example, breaks the “code” of male/female, gay/straight, and even sex/gender binaries (Garber 1992:133).

In a similar vein, Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the liminality of hybridity as “third space” and Anzaldúa’s (1987) concept of *la mestiza* as the “third element” both highlight

the way in which introducing a third acts as an interruption to conceptual dualisms, on which the politics of identity so often rely. As Garber, Bhabha, and Anzaldúa all seem to suggest, this third is not quite a category or even an identity, rather it would be more accurately described as an identification or even consciousness, a space of rearticulating (and even disarticulating) current cultural boundaries and categorizations. For Bhabha this is a space that rejects the essentialist position of a purely conceived, “original or originary culture” (1990:211) and like Garber and Anzaldúa, he sees this third not as something that results from “two original moments,” but as that which unhinges ideas of purity, unity, and fixity by calling into question the concepts of both original and two, and thus, transcending them. In other words, by challenging binary thinking, it is an articulation of a “space of possibility,” in which “three puts in question the idea of one” (Garber 1992:11). Such a questioning or un-fixing can be highly disruptive and subversive and insofar as it challenges that which has been previously understood as stable, certain, and known, it can be a source of confusion and even crisis for those who hold onto more traditional categories. Broadly speaking, this means that notions of cultural communities as closed concepts (Caglar 1997), as well as narratives of assimilation, citizen, the state, and even family, need to be rethought. The presence of a third ultimately requires a counter-narrative, or in more anti-essentialist language, *counter-narratives*.

While the politics of identity might be characterized as an “identity-building” strategy with agendas related to assimilation and community, the politics of ambiguity is perhaps best characterized as one of “identity-blurring” with an anti-assimilationist agenda that often emphasizes resistance and difference (Gamson 1995:401). Put another

way, these logics highlight the difference between “boundary-defending” and “boundary-stripping,” or that of the tightening or loosening of the boundaries between identity classifications (Gamson 1995). Of course, in reality, the relationship between identity building and identity blurring, itself often essentialized, is much more complex and the antagonism between them, theoretically and politically, is not so clear-cut. In fact, both often rely on a human rights discourse and often use a similar moral language (Roen 2001). Neither are they necessarily mutually exclusive. Even as much as the politics of ambiguity seeks to blur boundaries, the move to erase them necessarily requires invoking them (Lorber 2000). Likewise, it is sometimes the case that essentialists employ an identity-blurring logic as part of a boundary-defending political strategy. The recent debate over U.S. President Barack Obama’s birth identity (as American or Kenyan) highlights one such moment.

The debate initiated by so-called “birthers” uses the “obscuring of identity” (Roen 2001) to promote an essentialist vision of who counts as a legitimate citizen. On the one hand, “birthers” engage in the politics of ambiguity to emphasize the indeterminacy and uncertainty of President Obama’s status as a member of the national community. At the same time, their agenda also clearly embraces the politics of identity, relying on notions of truth and even taking a biological slant regarding the naturalness of national identity (as a condition of one’s birth). Of course, the contrast between uncertainty and truth is telling. Given the political agenda of the group (indeterminacy signals illegitimacy), it is likely that the use of ambiguity was actually intended to provoke anxiety and unease, which have been fairly consistent cultural responses to that which is unknown. In effect, the “anxiety of ambiguity” can be a powerful tool for reaffirming essentialized notions of

identity (Zerubavel 1991). By calling on Obama to prove he was born in Hawaii and thus his inclusion as a true American, “birthers” emphasize American identity as something pure and original. Not only does this political strategy attempt to naturalize American identity, but it also conceptualizes identity as something stable and unchangeable. Of course, this logic ignores the historical reality of Hawaii’s “recent” statehood. In fact, the United States *imposed* citizenship on Hawaii’s residents in 1959. Had Obama been born in 1958 instead of 1961, he would not necessarily have been “born” American. Thus, his national identity (like all national identities) is historically contingent, only made possible as a result of the redefining of state and national boundaries.

As many have argued, requiring Obama to prove his legitimacy is as much about “placing” his ethnoracial identity as it is about his national identity. In fact, as some political scholars have argued, to raise questions about Obama’s birth is also to enact a kind of “racial essentialism” (Gilbert 2005; Harris-Perry 2011). According to Georgetown professor Michael Eric Dyson (2011), Obama’s release of his long-form birth certificate was as much about saying “I am a legitimate American” as it was about being an African-American. As Dyson points out, being African-American means always being questioned about the legitimacy of your belonging. Suspicion and disbelief about the success – and even humanity – of black people has been a pervasive form of racism, “feeding the perception that [they] don’t quite measure up” (Dyson 2011). Not unlike questions of the location of his birth, Obama’s perceived “blackness,” as blackness so often has, becomes a way to delegitimize not just his achievements, but also his membership in the political community. As one journalist put it, the president is being

treated no differently than “some brother caught driving too nice a car in too nice a neighborhood after dark” (Pitts 2011).

At the same time, and perhaps more in line with conceptualizations of identity as something pure and original, the question of Obama’s birth may also be a question of whether he is “sufficiently Negro,” a uniquely *American* historical classification of black identity that has typically been associated with a vague and complicated ancestral history – a population of people “literally without a country” (Harris-Perry 2011) and likewise, a population historically alienated from the claims of birth and blood (Patterson 1982). The fact that Obama has had a clear and confident understanding of his family history may be the very thing that calls his (African) American identity into question. It is not just his success that breaches (racist) notions about what it means to be “black”; it is also the fact that he has “access to both his American and his African selves” (Harris-Perry 2011). For those that embrace the politics of identity then, he breaches a distinctly American narrative of slavery that defines “true Negro” through the guise of the politics of ambiguity, as that of natal and genealogical obscurity (Patterson 1982:331), a kind of “social death” (Patterson 1982:38). Considering the long history of the denial of citizenship to black Americans, the question of Obama’s birth suggests an interesting reversal: whether he is “Negro” enough to be American.

It is certainly an essentialist logic that demands proof of belonging in the first place. But ambiguity and the anxiety it provokes are also sometimes used in the service of essentialism. After all, as Steven Seidman (1993) points out, there is a link between the repression of more ambiguous categories and the naturalizing of clearly defined ones. Interestingly, the same essentialist logic that supports the racist subtext of the “birthers”

debate has also proven itself to be politically effective for civil rights movements and minority group protections. In fact, the political project of identity building has been recognized as operationally valuable even by those who simultaneously reject its claims of categorical truths (Spivak [1984] 1990). Although notions of fixed identity boundaries have certainly been used as tools of oppression and exclusion, clear group membership has also proven itself to be politically powerful for those who share a minority status. For civil rights movements in particular, identity communities that emphasize clear and exclusive boundaries as well as common characteristics are more likely to be politically effective.

Deeming categories as fluid or permeable and group membership as indiscernible weakens their political potential for obtaining resources, rights, and protections. The possibility of a “multiracial” category on the Census, for example, has been seen by civil rights activists as a “wrecking ball aimed at affirmative action” (Wright 1994). In fact, the ambiguity embedded in multiracialism “threatens to undermine the concept of racial classification altogether” (Wright 1994), and from the perspective of those who rely on the politics of identity, this also means an undermining of the political power and advantages that these identity classifications can confer. If individuals do not fit neatly into these classifications, federal benefits, programs, and laws protecting these classifications (like affirmative action) cannot be implemented or monitored. In other words, identity categories can be critically relevant for social change. Categories, like ethnoracial categories – however false they may be – allow for a solidarity and cohesion and a way to mobilize around the idea of some shared characteristic. Many agree with Lawrence Wright (1994) in his estimation that although essentialist-based schemas (like

the one-drop rule) have certainly promoted racism, they have also “galvanized the black community as well.” The “black community” and its efforts toward social justice could only come into being through the idea of “black” and an understanding of the shared experience of “blackness.”

In fact, this has become a major criticism of deconstruction – that it makes community and shared experience impossible to theorize. With its emphasis on an “anti-identity politic” (Seidman 1993:122), deconstruction neglects, in Werbner’s terms, “the ontological grounds of experience” and the “phenomenology of embodiment” (1997:226). In Roen’s (2001) study of transsexual politics, for example, her respondents point out that their experience as members of an either/or gender community is real and embodied, not merely discursive. In addition, as these respondents also suggest, by elevating both/neither frameworks of identity as more politically worthy than either/or frameworks (Roen 2001), deconstruction takes for granted that blurring boundaries necessarily leads to liberation (Gamson 1995). In reality they argue, when it comes to gender norms, the ambiguity indicative of both/neither not only weakens their political recourse, but it can also be life threatening.

At the same time, however, many of Roen’s (2001) transgender respondents also indicate that they simply do not fit into either/or labels and express a deep ambivalence and even discomfort in this lack of belonging. This is not unlike the “pain” expressed by immigrants who sometimes experience their ethnic identities as unreadable (and unassimilable) in a social world that continuously tries to read (and assimilate) them (Banerjee 2002). As much as essentialist-based notions of identity have been politically powerful, they have also had the effect of displacing and disorienting, of silencing and

suppressing. As Werbner reminds us, we cannot ignore that in addition to protection laws, liberatory revolutions, and anti-oppression movements, essentialist constructions and the rigid mindset that supports them, have also been used to justify “racial murders, ethnic cleansing...even genocide” (1997:229). From this perspective, progressive political gain can only be achieved in the dismantling of either/or categories and the boundaries that hold them in place.

### **Straddling the Line: Beyond Either/Or and Both/Neither**

As political strategies, *both* the politics of identity *and* the politics of ambiguity, as Gamson puts it, “are right” (1995:400). But in being set up oppositionally to each other, both are also insufficient and the fact they are often positioned in this way tends to mask intermediary positions for identity. Although notions of the “liminal” (Van Gennep [1908] 1960) have received a significant amount of attention within social theories as that which is “betwixt and between” (Turner 1967), the hyphenated identity, as one such in-between position, has been much less recognized. In fact, though hyphenation has gained an increased frequency in the critical discourse of literary theory and cultural studies, it has been largely invisible in sociological discussions, even those that have taken up the nuances of the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity. Yet its betwixt and between status, particularly the way it operates politically between identity-building and identity-blurring agendas – its political liminality – should not be overlooked. Although criticized by some as merely textual, the hyphenated identity might best understood as situated between either/or and both/neither positions as well as between the rigid and fluid cognitive logics that support these positions.



Despite the absence of conceptual attention to the hyphenated identity as liminal, Turner's work on the "liminal period" provides a useful theoretical moment for understanding its complexity. As Turner (1967) and Van Gennep ([1908] 1960) before him point out, intermediate statuses are not inevitably disruptive to rigid systems. As in the case of *rites de passage*, the liminal period may actually function to keep social locations, situations, or statuses rigidly separated and clearly demarcated, only allowing the boundaries between the statuses to be "traversed" (Van Gennep [1908] 1960:3) through an intervening period of "transition" (Turner 1967:4). Yet, as Turner points out, in providing a pathway between these locations, the liminal period may also create a moment of disruption – a break in classificatory order – rendering the subject involved in the transition ambiguous or "structurally indefinable" (1967:6), even if only temporarily. That is, what Turner called a "transitional-being" or "liminal *persona*" – the moment in which one is "no longer classified" and simultaneously "not yet classified" (1967:6). Such an understanding of liminality and its structural ambiguity recognizes the both/and, as well as "neither," status of the liminal subject: "neither one thing nor the other, or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere" (Turner 1967:7).

Of course, unlike Turner's conceptualization of liminality as a "a becoming...even a transformation, (1967:6), the hyphenated identity is not necessarily transitioning from one classification to another. Turner's liminality highlights a temporal aspect which may not be present in the same way for hyphenators, particularly the idea that liminality signals the midpoint in a movement between statuses and thus, a temporary phase. This is not to say, of course, that hyphenated forms are never characterized as transitory spaces. Take the evolutionary movement of language that Strunk and White suggest, in which the

hyphenated form is a midpoint in a movement toward grammatically preferred solid forms. For example, the evolution of “electronic mail” to “e-mail” to the solid “email,” in which the hyphenated e-mail is the liminal form, seems to more closely resemble the transformative phases of liminal experience and the temporal aspect remains intact. Likewise, in the case of assimilation, Hyphenated Americanism was sometimes considered a midpoint to move through on one’s way to becoming simply American - the eventual symbolic death of one’s former cultural allegiances and one’s rebirth as American.

But hyphenation has also been read as symbolic space that has not required a movement between statuses, as in the case of those who express a sense of lifelong cultural hyphenation as well as those who have hyphenated surnames. In many ways it has been the perceived permanence of identity hyphenation, that people might remain in the middle, that has made it seem so ambiguous. As in the case of surname hyphenators, for example, the hyphen might actually be used to self-consciously “do” this midpoint, as a way to continuously represent, reflect, or simply contemplate one’s contradictory feelings around societal expectations of family identity and one’s individual interpretations. In the case of Hyphenated Americans as well, the hyphenated label often comes to represent an intersection of contradictory cultural messages in which assimilative pressures are met with opposing expectations to preserve one’s own cultural interests. In this sense, by not resolving these conflicts, the hyphenated identity label does not mark a transition between statuses, and unlike the liminal persona, is not necessarily characterized by a ritual transformation.

Despite this, liminality nonetheless remains a useful concept for thinking about hyphenation. Even in the context of hyphenators, although the hyphenated identity is not a phase to move through per se, it is like the liminal experience inasmuch as it permits a similar traversing of the boundaries between certain statuses. In the case of marital hyphenators, for example, hyphenation allows one to bridge the divisions between statuses traditionally seen as separate, discrete, and mutually exclusive segments of one's life biography. Despite the tendency to see pre-married and post-married life as segmented biographical periods, in which the marriage itself might serve as the rite of passage, marital hyphenators use the hyphen to traverse the temporal disjuncture between pre- and post- statuses and to build a sense of continuity into their social biographies.

This is different from Turner's liminality, however, which signals an intervening space of separation from both statuses and from society, because the hyphenated subject does not express a complete break with either of the statuses. Whereas the liminal subject's both/and status is mediated by a simultaneously "neither" status, making it "structurally dead," the hyphenated subject might be best understood as potentially able to *remain* both/and (Turner 1967:6). In spatial terms, hyphenators use the hyphen to carve out a narrative space that can accommodate a conjoining of distinct identities and the specifics of those identity biographies. In temporal terms, this is a kind of dynamic permanence rather than a static permanence. As Trinh puts it, "born over and over again as hyphen rather than as fixed entity," a kind of "shuttling between frontiers" (1991:159).

On one hand then, the hyphenated subject may be similar to the liminal subject in that it simply does not fit into rigidly defined either/or classificatory structures – whether temporarily or permanently, both express a condition "of ambiguity and paradox, a

confusion of all customary categories” (Turner 1967:7). On the other hand, however, rather than facilitating a unidirectional transition between statuses conceived of as either/or, as the liminal period might suggest, the hyphenated label might be best understood as (dynamically) freezing these statuses in a bidirectional state of both/and; thus, unlike the liminal subject it is never truly neither. Nonetheless, while either/or renderings rely on notions of a fixed and unequivocal identity and both/neither renderings “tend to cancel out” into a “zero identity” (Brody 2008:97) that simply refuses to fit in (Roen 2001), the both/and hyphenated identity represents a middle position, in some ways disrupting conventional classifications, yet in other ways still adhering to them. In this sense, by not fully fitting into one status or the other, yet also by not fully abandoning these statuses, the hyphenated identity seems to deploy both the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity simultaneously. Unlike previous theories which have understood this identity as either moving toward an anti-assimilationist agenda, fetishizing difference, or as moving toward an assimilationist one, pushing for sameness, I argue that the cultural display of hyphenation explicitly takes up both discourses.

Although some have criticized hyphenation for its “restrictive doubling” (Furth 1994) – that it doesn’t signal multiplicity so much as binarity restated, which limits its radical potential – in fact, hyphenation brings the binary relationship to the surface and reappropriates its duality in a different way. Like the concept of “third” I discussed earlier, and to some extent Turner’s understanding of liminality, the hyphen has an intervening effect, by calling into question notions of “one” (or even “two”), it similarly opens up a space of possibility. After all, as Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram (2004) seem to suggest, the hyphen intervenes as a third. But unlike some deconstructionist renderings of

the third as unfixing identity, hyphenation never entirely does this. Both/and may come to signal the multiplicity, even simultaneity of identity categories, as both “here” and “there,” (Visweswaran 1994), and thus may rupture the notions of identity as singular and fixed, but “here” and “there” nonetheless remain as fixed points.

The hyphenated identity may cross boundaries, challenge previously established categories, force us to reassess singular and unified notions of identity, and may even make boundaries appear vulnerable. But as much as it may reorient boundaries, it does not necessarily erase them (Isaacson 1996). Instead, conceptual ambiguity is in constant tension with conceptual clarity. As Nicole Isaacson suggests, for example, the concept of the “fetus-infant” is able to be used by *both* pro-life groups *and* pro-choice groups for this very reason (1996:469). It signals a departure from conventional classifications, yet the categories “fetus” and “infant” remain as conceptually separate, readable, and associated with distinct qualities. At the same time, introducing the hyphen requires that these distinct qualities be taken together, as part of the same project of classification. In other words, the “lumping” and “splitting” (Zerubavel 1996) of categories happens simultaneously around the hyphen.

This often means that in many cases of identity, though not always, hyphenation signals a highly flexible logic of classification, and one that perhaps signals a middle position between the rigid logic of essentialism and the fluid logic of deconstruction (Zerubavel 1991). That is, both/and rather than either/or or even both/neither. And it is also this flexibility, the vacillating between both positions, that can make the “structure of meaning and reference” of the hyphenated identity highly unstable and thus, ambiguous, particularly for those who are committed to more rigid and essentialist visions of identity,

as the politics of identity would imply (Bhabha 1994:54; Gatzouras 2002). I am not suggesting that such an articulation is unproblematic. Part of the challenge of defining the cultural content of “the” hyphenated identity is to risk either relying on a (new) essentialist logic (Verdery 1994) or mythologizing hyphenation’s disruptive potential. Both undermine the multidimensional politic from which hyphenation is constructed. Although on some level a reading of the hyphenated identity fundamentally requires a slip into essentialism, analytic necessity should not be mistaken for conceptual rendering. In other words, although there is no universal hyphenated identity or standpoint, an analysis of the hyphenated “identity” as such requires at least some universalizing of a hyphenated experience and a carving out of what that means. Even calling attention to the instability of the hyphenated identity might be read as a move toward (theoretically) stabilizing it. Yet is not my intention to suggest that hyphenated constructions are in any way real, rooted in the natural, part of “who” or “what” one is, or that it is the only part of one’s experience. And I do not mean to replace the essentialism of homogeneity with an essentialism of heterogeneity nor suggest that heterogeneity is normal and difference is inevitable.

Likewise, as many theorists have pointed out, the cultural politics surrounding identity hyphenation have often been based in exclusion, and as I will suggest later, have more often resulted in repressive consequences than liberating ones. The fact that the hyphenated identity might be understood as “lingering” in liminality, for example, gives rise to perceptions not just of its ambiguity, but also as something that needs to be “brought under control” (Douglas [1966] 2002:ix). As Mary Douglas ([1966] 2002) observes, cultural reactions to categorical anomalies and their ambiguity have typically

been that of anxiety and even avoidance. In her observations, bringing this ambiguity under control is not simply a matter of recategorizing, but involves specific pollution behaviors, including negatively marking the ambiguous as impure, polluted, contaminated, and harmful. In other words, pollution, the possibility of harm, and the fear of contagion become ways to reaffirm and reinforce distinctive boundaries between categories.

*Cognitively Unclear and Morally Unclean*

Such reactions are similar to that which is seen in hyphen-hating discourses in which hyphenation is not only marked as ambiguous – cognitively unclear – but also as something dangerous – morally unclean. And such sentiments are not unlike grammatical concerns over the linguistic flexibility of the hyphen and the trickster discourse that tends to emerge. As Paul Shepard observes (not unlike Douglas), “the degree of [this] upset indicates that something more is disturbed” than just the classification system itself (1978:76). Although Shepard is talking specifically about the ambiguity of animals, his point can be applied more generally to social life as well as to the specific cognitive approaches to the hyphenated identity. Because social actors have a vested interest in maintaining certain boundaries, especially those perceived as critical to a particular social order, that which is both/and, “on the margins,” or “betwixt and between” is often perceived as impure and threatening (Douglas [1966] 2002:121). And Zerubavel points out, such notions of threat and disorder are not necessarily inevitable; rather, they are often the result of a rigid cultural logic or “style of organizing” the world (1997:59). The rigid mind’s commitment to the separation of categories, as well as mutual exclusivity

and a specifically either/or compartmentalization, is not simply a matter of “intellectual convenience,” but is also a way to control the perceived instability and chaos that might result from open-ended pluralism (Harris 1997:11-12). Acknowledging twilight zones (Zerubavel 1991:35) would call into question the irrefutability and inevitability of classification divides through which the social world is ordered, something that the rigid mind cannot comprehend. Thus, the rigid mind confronts “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Zerubavel 1991:34) with panic and avoidance, even to the extent this panic sometimes takes shape in the form of superstitions. This is why, for example, the hours around dusk are often associated with menace and danger; threshold areas like doorways and doorsteps are seen as vulnerable to evil and thus require symbols for protection; and ambiguous animals like bats, with the appearance of part-rodent and part-bird, are commonly associated with the underworld in many cultural traditions (Zerubavel 1991:35).

And this is precisely the same logic that has been used to label the hyphen as threat. Anything that disrupts or confuses either/or compartmentalization then, as the hyphenated identity does, not only becomes filtered through notions of contamination and danger, but these notions also function as a disambiguating tactic, ultimately toward creating conformity and social order (Douglas [1966] 2002). In other words, ideas about impurity, contagion, and danger are used to denounce uncertainties, to preserve clear categorical distinctions, and ultimately to make those distinctions unquestionable. It is particularly telling that early pollution discourses of dirt, contamination, and contagion actually pre-date medical discourses regarding hygiene or disease. Interpretations of that which is unclean or impure is essentially what Douglas calls “matter out of place”



([1966] 2002:40), the overlap or blurriness of boundaries, which may result in entities not being easily or clearly categorized. Thus, the unclean is not a reflection of hygienic pathology, but is instead a reflection of that which is unclear or uncertain (Zerubavel 1991:37) – in both cognitive and moral terms. In this sense, the unclean is also seen as rejecting a moral code – in which categories are understood as familiar, shared with others, and most importantly, held in place by a clear moral landscape of “right and wrong” (Garfinkel 1967:35).

This is particularly pronounced in Harold Garfinkel’s (1967) study of a male-to-female transsexual named Agnes, in which the rigidly perceived categories of male and female become complicated by the incongruity between Agnes’s “visible” gender and her “natural-born” sex. As Garfinkel reminds the reader, “from the standpoint of an adult member of our society, the population of normal persons is a morally dichotomized population”: male and female (1967:122). As a hybrid individual, not unlike the hyphenated subject, Agnes’s ambiguous gender doesn’t just disrupt this categorical opposition, it also disrupts moral certainties. Those who transgress the boundaries of normal – that is, those who stand in moral opposition to rigid classificatory schemas – provoke such fear and loathing that they are often treated with “revulsion” (Davis 1983:92) and are perceived as “incompetent, criminal, sick, and sinful” (Garfinkel 1967:122). In Murray Davis’s (1983) understanding, introducing ambiguity into a moral landscape, as Agnes does, not only disrupts the mutual exclusivity of what are otherwise perceived as sharply separated categories, but it also provokes such loss of “cognitive orientation” that it is almost experienced physically. Like the negative marking of symbols that Douglas ([1966] 2002:121) observes, that which undermines this moral

order is perceived as threatening, horrifying, and even sickening (Davis 1983): cognitively unclear and morally unclear. Even Agnes herself appears to be socialized to this rigid logic. Rather than remain ambiguous, Agnes seeks out surgery as a way to disambiguate her sexual membership, to reconstruct the either/or divide between male and female, and ultimately to reaffirm her moral legitimacy (Zerubavel 1991:47).

Such exceptional rigidity is not simply a reflection of some natural order. Instead, these classifications and the logic we use to construct them are decidedly social and thus, not the only way of classifying reality. Had Agnes had a more flexible conception of classification (Zerubavel 1991:121), she would perhaps have been able to discard conventional gender distinctions and their moral prescriptions and instead see her identity as more toward both/and. Unlike the rigid mind and its particular obsession with the purity of categories, the “mental mobility” (Zerubavel 1991:121) that characterizes a more flexible logic of classification recognizes the inevitability of ambiguity in social life and allows for entities to be situated in multiple contexts without sliding into formlessness. Such a both/and logic recognizes that despite our “neat and orderly classifications notwithstanding, the world presents itself not in pure black and white but, rather, in ambiguous shades of gray, with mental twilight zones and intermediate essences” (Zerubavel 1991:71). So while the rigid mind rejects such ambiguous renderings of boundaries, the flexible mind may actually engage this ambiguity. In this sense, although at times attentive to firm boundaries, a flexible logic is one that is not necessarily intolerant of ambiguity. And this becomes a significant characteristic of the hyphenated identity.

In the chapters that follow, I consider the cognitive and moral implications of this ambiguity as well as the specific cultural politics of ambiguity that emerge in Hyphenated Americanism and surname hyphenation. Although I would fundamentally consider the hyphenated identity a “brand” of the ambiguous, its particularity, the way in which it has been enacted and the debates it has brought to the forefront, really rests in the fact it flexibly enacts both rigid identity schemas, like those of the politics of identity, as well as more fluid schemas, like those of the politics of ambiguity. And in exploring this flexibility, as allowing one to move in and between these schemas, this project moves away from reified visions of ambiguity as necessarily “fuzzy” (Zerubavel 1991) and challenges deconstructionist perspectives that read ambiguity as always politically resistant (Epstein and Straub 1991). In other words, as much as ambiguity has been perceived as disrupting and resisting identity boundaries, it can also be used in the service of creating and maintaining them, by both hyphenators and hyphen-haters. For example, as hyphenators move toward resisting conventional classifications, they simultaneously make competing claims that rely on discourses of assimilation and community and reaffirm the value of identity as a coherent and unified given. In this sense, although hyphenators may use hyphenation to signal an expression of not fitting in and a self-conscious move away from static and singular self-categorizations, it has also often signaled a “wish” (Petchesky 1979:375) for community and belonging (Banerjee 2002).

Interestingly, this co-mingling of both identity and ambiguity politics has similarly been the case with those who have advocated against the hyphenated identity. On one hand, similar to the political enactments in the “birthers” debate, hyphen-haters

underscore hyphenation's identity-blurring capacity to express and provoke anxiety and fear. At the same time, they use hyphenation to reassert assimilationist and community agendas more often found in essentializing discourses. In this way, the politics of identity might really be understood as part of the politics of assimilation (Visweswaran 1994:305) or similarly, the politics of community. For example, in the case of the Hyphenated American, which I discuss in the next chapter, endowing hyphenation and hyphenators with anxiety becomes part of a project of legitimizing a common and unified American identity. Stated differently, hyphen-haters invoke the cultural politics of ambiguity (coded as either threatening or exotic) as a kind of stigma in order to provoke and produce sameness (Rutherford 1990). The terms of belonging for American identity then, are defined through the estrangement of hyphenated others. Thus, invested with claims of both belonging and estrangement (Gatzouras 2002), community and individualism, and assimilation and resistance, the hyphenated identity underscores the way in which the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity can be deployed simultaneously.

### Chapter 3

#### The Hyphenated Ethnic

I eat hyphenated food, sleep and dream among hyphens, and in a sense am a walking,  
talking hyphen. – Sandra Gilbert, *Mysteries of the Hyphen*

Discourse surrounding the hyphen reveals a tradition toward unity, not simply related to grammar, but also as deeply embedded in American identity politics. Grammatical notions of the hyphen as requiring “surveillance” and needing to be “put in its place” (Teall 1937), much like the notions of the hyphen as “disorderly” and involved in “trickery,” have clearly been implicated in the social discourse surrounding hyphenated identities, including Hyphenated Americanism. Despite claims as a nation of immigrants, American identity politics has tended to favor assimilation over cultural pluralism. In fact, expressions of unity – “out of many, one” and “united we stand” – have been perceived as fundamental to democratic ideals and the very essence of Americanism. Even more recently, during the “birthers” debate that I mentioned earlier, supporters of the movement emphasized “unalienable and *undivided* allegiance” as the defining characteristic of natural-born citizenship. Conceptions of a nation “bound together” remind us that becoming American is conveyed as part of an evolutionary (and linear) narrative that ultimately requires immigrants and their loyalties to be absorbed into “*one nation* under God.” The national project of social cohesion is also a project of cultural homogenizing and one that ultimately makes being “betwixt and between” not

only difficult, but negatively assessed. Within this schema, the construction of the hyphenated identity takes shape, and the hyphen itself becomes “the marker of emergent entities that should *evolve* by *dissolving* into a dominant, unified ‘whole.’” (Brody 2008:92; emphasis added). Hyphenation is not only often read as the antithesis to unity, but it also calls into question the singular, discrete, and binary construction of categories, on which notions of cultural identities often rely.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, in particular, hyphenation began to take on a moral significance in nationalist discourse, specifically concerning so-called Hyphenated Americans (e.g. German-Americans, Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, and Polish-Americans). In 1915, amidst growing conflict in Europe, *The Literary Digest* asserted that the “hyphenate issue” was the most vital concern of the present day (Higham 1988:198). Shortly thereafter, Edward Steiner wrote his *Confessions of a Hyphenated American*, summarizing the development of the phrase “Hyphenated American” and thus the hyphen’s cultural metamorphosis from “short, innocent dash” to “elongated damnable damn [sic]” (1916:6-7). Although I would argue that the hyphen was far from innocent in grammatical writings of the same and even earlier periods, Steiner’s observation signals the perceived social significance attached to the hyphen.

This significance becomes even more apparent when juxtaposed with the rhetoric of Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, who employed their own discourse of chaos and trickery to admonish Hyphenated Americans, specifically calling attention to “The Hyphen” lurking between nostalgic immigrant and legitimate American. Rather than bridge or pathway, the hyphen becomes conceived as partition and divider (Brody 2008:95). Interestingly, what eventually became the American “anti-

hyphenate movement,” with its guiding principle of “Absolute and Unqualified Loyalty” (Higham 1988:200), reflected a disdain for the hyphen that was more about its performance as a cultural concept than it was about any actual hyphenation. In fact, the extent to which ethnic identities were grammatically hyphenated during this time remains unclear, yet the concept of the Hyphenated American was pervasive. With the increased political agitation and instability in Europe, the United States faced uncertainty in its future as an international power and in the fate of its people. Within this contextual backdrop, “Hyphenated Americanism” came to mean patriotic ambivalence, a quality constructed as treasonous, and something that also exposed a national ambivalence toward an increasingly foreign-born population. Hyphenated Americans were perceived as divided, partial Americans, resistant to assimilation, with uncertain loyalties, and therefore ultimately dangerous to the task of nation-building. As President Woodrow Wilson put it, “any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic” (New York Times 1919). Given this sentiment, a secure and unified nation is a nation without hyphens. Interestingly, the graphic and iconic similarity of hyphens and daggers underscores just how precariously the hyphen has been perceived: uncontrollable, menacing, and divisive in both its meaning and design.

### **The Hyphenated American: Identity Assimilation and Resistance**

As many scholars have argued, the American experiment with immigration has arguably always been a morally ambiguous, “shifting mixture of goods and bads” (Graham 2004:4) and likewise, immigrant status itself might be considered always

already a liminal category (Zerubavel 1991:72-73). Yet despite the level of ambiguity that may already be embedded in the nature of immigration, it is primarily after Reconstruction that hyphenation surfaces as part of the political dialogue. For a post-civil war America, faced with the project of reconstructing state and society, (national) unity was a pressing concern (Brody 2008:90). During the war, however, with Confederates defined as the “factional...aggressive Other,” and with the high participation of European immigrants in Union forces, anti-foreign sentiments were diminished (Alexander 2006:433). Although ethnic particularities remained, to some extent immigrant participation mitigated ethnic divisions under the banner of a common cause. Incidentally, using the term Union provided the anti-secessionist army with the appearance of legitimacy and reinforced a “generalized” and “primordial” American identity (Alexander 2006:433). After the war, however, at the critical moment when the South needed to be reincorporated as part of the core group, the ethnic identities of immigrants became overwhelmingly filtered through a hyphenated discourse. While this should not be taken to suggest that concerns over ambiguous identities (i.e. their content) did not exist prior to the post-Civil War period, it does suggest the construction (and constructedness) of a particular form through which the identities were conceived. To a nation concerned with closing up divisions among territories, people, and ideologies, a social concept of hyphenation and its narrative of duality (rather than unity) is particularly discomfiting and such discomfort can be a tool to motivate unity. Similarly, in the decades that followed Reconstruction, mass immigration, increased industrialization, and impending world war accelerated the concern for a unified, common identity. National borders, social boundaries, and political loyalties were



becoming seen as increasingly permeable and for Roosevelt and Wilson, protecting the boundaries of a nation confronted with war meant clearly distinguishing its national essence and the political loyalty of its citizenry. Keeping the “inside” safe means that there can be no ambiguity (Gamson 1997), not only regarding loyalty but also about who counts as a citizen. Within this political landscape, distinguishing “good” immigrants from “bad” immigrants, “insiders” from “outsiders,” and “allies” from “enemies,” becomes not only relevant, but is seen as a matter of national security.

Such concerns with “closing up” divisions and making clear distinctions carries through even in the more contemporary case of the highly controversial Arizona immigration law, in which police officers are empowered to stop and detain individuals if they suspect that they are in the United States illegally. Under the law, immigrants would be required to carry identity documents legitimizing their presence as insiders. Similar to historically earlier concerns regarding post-civil war Reconstruction and Great Wave immigration, such a law highlights a “border dispute” (Zerubavel 1991), both in terms of literal borders as well as the conceptual borders between citizenship and ethnicity. The sense of failure of the physical boundary between the United States and Mexico (i.e. the failure to keep so-called “illegals” out) is addressed through a reliance on the symbolic boundaries between legal (good) and illegal (bad) immigrants or citizens and non-citizens, and by extension, insiders and outsiders. Although the actual legal understanding of citizen or non-citizen remains unchanged under this law, the symbolic criteria by which to *perceive* citizens and non-citizens become significant. In other words, being perceived as a citizen or having legal status, and therefore not being detained, becomes dependent on one’s perceived ethnic identity and certain symbolic types of cultural

differences, such as language, dress, skin color, etc (Jiménez 2008). Given that the majority of citizens in the United States come from immigrant histories, the fact that Hispanics or Latinos might face increased scrutiny in Arizona, regardless of actual citizenship status, signals that certain identities are perceived as more incompatible with notions of legitimate citizenship and thus, more often perceived as outsiders.

Interestingly, although “illegal” immigrants targeted by the Arizona law have not specifically been referred to as hyphenated, hyphenated discourse has nonetheless been deployed in this debate. In particular, in his Congressional address responding to criticism over the law, Representative Tom McClintock (2010) drew upon a speech by President Theodore Roosevelt known as the “Hyphenated American” speech. By specifically emphasizing Roosevelt’s insistence on “one flag,” “one language,” and “sole loyalty” (The New York Times 1915), McClintock pointed out that the undermining of immigration laws is a move toward hyphenation, which he suggests is the ultimate resistance to assimilation. Despite the fact that he never refers to illegal immigrants as hyphenated, he specifically operationalizes hyphenation as the instrument behind illegal immigration and other anti-assimilative agendas.

Whether in the context of Reconstruction, immigration laws like those in Arizona, or even in the appeals to “unhyphenated” Americanism that followed the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks (Navarrette 2001), discourses of hyphenation have tended to be utilized during times when there has been dramatic national insecurity. Promoted and reinforced by political claims makers as “threat to nation,” the hyphen is cast onto immigrants during cultural moments when there have been significant efforts to produce a coherent American national identity. Hyphenated discourse, with its focus on duality (often

conflated with “duplicity”), functions to mark and overdetermine the cultural anxieties of a nation facing immense social and economic change. In these moments, the threat to national unity and the role of the “factional Other” is displaced onto immigrants, already marginal persons, as part of a project of nation-(re)building. In other words, shaped by hegemonic (and equally anti-secessionist) ideas about belonging and not belonging (Ong 1996) and assimilation and resistance, the hyphenated immigrant, a liminal figure, becomes the “face” of the potential dangers of national disunity and moreover, a sign of the category crisis of national identity (Garber 1992:17).

To be clear, although the Hyphenated American has often been embedded in the politics of ambiguity, in ways that have made anxiety over ambiguity more concrete, it has simultaneously functioned in the service of the politics of identity, as part of a process of defining, legitimizing, and authenticating Americanism. As Brody puts it, “American-ness depends upon the hyphen for its (dis)articulation” (2008:107). In fact, investing the “factional Other” with “terrors” (Rutherford 1990:11) has actually been a strategy toward securing the parameters and boundaries of American identity; that is, toward identity-building. In this sense, applying the hyphen might even be understood as a way to patrol the boundaries of nativism. Constructing the hyphen as threat uses fear of the dissolution of boundaries and by extension, fear of the “dissolution of self” (Rutherford 1990:11), as a way to mobilize boundary-constriction, to reassert notions of a pure and originary American identity, and to subsume “Other” identities into a narrative of unity. In this way, hyphenation presents an interesting paradox, what Alexander calls a “double movement” (2006:431), which the Civil War helped to create. Although democratic discourse articulates incorporation into American civil society as detached

from primordial qualities, in reality membership in the American community, along with its rights and privileges, has been highly stratified on essentialist grounds (Alexander 2006). Incorporative and assimilationist agendas may lend themselves to the promise of equality and inclusion, but they often take shape in more restrictive forms, limiting participation and moving toward an exclusionary sense of “we.” Hyphenation, what Alexander (2006) articulates as a “mode” of incorporation with both assimilative and anti-assimilative dimensions, tends to articulate both a widening and a narrowing of American identity. On one hand, hyphenation comes to be seen as a manifestation of liberty, a way to incorporate ethnic identities with core identities, expanding “the primordial criteria defining the American core group” (Alexander 2006:434) and blending those identities into “a new race, one that will exhibit only the unique particularity of ‘America’ itself” (Alexander 2006:432). On the other hand, hyphenation can be seen as highly divisive, and through binary codes it can be used as a way to rank primordial qualities (Alexander 2006:433) and thus, can be used toward a narrowing of what constitutes proper Americanism. In this way, the hyphenated identity can be both foil and muse to an authentic American identity, which is itself a fragile authenticity born out of a complex, contingent, and invented national origin.

### *Questionably ‘Essentially’ American*

The task of defining who counts as American then, with all of its associated rights and responsibilities, has ultimately been the task of determining the *essence* of Americanism (Ricento 2003:617). In this way, the construction of an American identity has been contingent on defining the boundaries of inclusion (“us”) as well as exclusion

(“them”), and any ambiguity of these boundaries has often been used to justify exclusion. In fact, as I have suggested, although on the surface American identity appears to be pluralistic, in reality, the very *idea* of Americanism has been formulated through “myths of homogeneity” (Williams 1989), often deployed in “one nation” rhetoric, and the rigid dichotomizing of us/them, particularly through the contrast of purity/impurity. Founded in Puritan religious culture, the rationalized “this-worldly” pragmatism of early American life, like the frontier mentality that characterized American national expansion, relied on the ability to clearly distinguish (and ultimately dominate) an uncertain and untidy world and its “wild” natives. This tradition of cultural “gardening,” distinguishing between the *pure* and useful “plants” and the *impure* and wild “weeds” (Bauman 1991:20), shapes the boundaries of us/them and comes to inform the historical stance toward Hyphenated Americans. Generally speaking, the legacy of this mentality becomes constituted in a similar contrast of purity and impurity, and supplies the logic for evaluating Hyphenated Americans, including their motives as social and political actors and thus, their very legitimacy as Americans. Appeals for “100 percent” Americanism and “absolute and unqualified loyalty,” for example, which shaped the discourse of the anti-hyphenate movement, not only emphasized a sense of unity, but were also appeals for social purity (Higham 1988:204). Such narratives of unity and purity work together to construct a shared sense of nation and to institutionalize the criteria required for inclusion.

For Williams (1989), as well as Alexander (2006), notions of purity and impurity act as a master contrast and powerful narrative that guides social and political life. In Williams’s (1989) view, the contrast of purity and impurity becomes recoded as “authentic” or “inauthentic,” which in turn is used to justify boundaries between “us” and

racial or ethnic “others.” Moreover, according to Douglas, categories built on the relationship between the pure and the impure actually tend to be reflections on social order and disorder (1966:7). Ideas about purity and impurity, their separation, and the social impulse to purify, “have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between...that a semblance of order is created” (Douglas 1966:5). In other words, this “system of labels,” has an organizing effect through which experiences and behaviors become filtered (Douglas 1966:46). In the case of Americanism, for example, distinguishing those who are pure (deemed insiders, worthy, authentic, and legitimate) from those who are impure (deemed outsiders, unworthy, inauthentic, and illegitimate) provides a way to make assessments about “who should be included...and who should not, about who is considered a friend and who an enemy” (Alexander 2006:55-59). When it comes to American identity, insiders are “friends” who exhibit civic virtue rather than civic vice (Alexander 2006) and therefore deserve the most social rewards and benefits. In other words, notions of purity and pollution act to guide not just positionings in the social order, but also access to resources and privileges.

The Hyphenated American label, however, similar to mixed race labels (Gilbert 2005), tends to be perceived as resistant to clear notions of categorical purity and complicates the boundaries not only between pure/impure, but also the related contrasts of insider/outsider and friend/enemy. Because notions of purity tend to be central tenets of identity-building and thus tend to privilege clear, discrete, and unitary identities, “displacing the idea of solid centers and unified wholes with borderlands and zones of contest [requires] a rethinking of identity and culture as constructed and relational,

instead of ontologically given and essential” (Conquergood 1990:184). Literally situated “betwixt and between” categories, the hyphen undermines the “exaggerating of difference” that Douglas suggests is critical for social order (1966:5). Not only does the structural doubleness around the hyphen resist singular category membership, on which the “solid center” depends, this has also meant a disruption of essentialist visions of a pure and originary identity. While some immigrants have historically been treated as unambiguously *not* American (e.g. “Orientals” and “Negroes”), the essence associated with Hyphenated Americans has been less clear. With cultural practices (and skin color) perceived as more similar to colonial Americans than Asians or Africans, Hyphenated Americans (initially German and Irish), with their “original sin of the late entry” (Bauman 1991:59), could be “*questionably* essentially” American. There has been the *possibility* that the hyphen might “merge to the center” (Brody 2008:94) and this has marked the “ambivalence of hyphenation and the particular kind of instability that attends it” (Alexander 2006:433). In this way, the representation of immigrants as hyphenated highlights an ambivalence over which discourse (pure/impure) should be applied and to which category (us/them) they belonged.

This ambivalence and the questionable status of Hyphenated Americans becomes particularly apparent in historical debates surrounding the so-called “hyphen vote,” which marked the concern that Hyphenated Americans, as voters, might favor their European allegiances over national needs (New York Times 1916a; New York Times 1916b). Not unlike the American cultural narrative of unity, this was figuratively a question of whether a “half-American” should get a “whole” vote. Because voting is a significant indicator of citizenship, historically setting the boundary between insiders and outsiders,

the hyphen vote raised the question of whether Hyphenated Americans were deserving of the franchise and more importantly, whether they were deserving of the insider status that voting conferred. In other words, voting becomes an institutionalized practice that shapes the boundaries between belonging and not belonging.

As a cultural practice, voting has very decisively communicated “public standing” and “membership” (Shklar 1991:2-3), and according to Judith Shklar, such membership has from the very beginning been derived from its exclusion to outsiders, “primarily from its denial to slaves...” (1991:16). The meaning of the vote evolved from this contrast between insider and outsider groups and involved judgments symbolically represented in terms of purity and pollution. Within an American ethos, “to be refused the right [to vote] was to be *almost* a slave,” a polluted master status symbolically opposed to that of citizen and “explicitly *not* American” (Shklar 1991:17, emphasis added; Alexander 2006:118; Brody 2008:94). In contrast with impure inferiors, citizens were worthy, and their civil power was sacred. Yet hyphenated voters did not clearly fit into the citizen/slave opposition. They were “not slaves,” but were also not seen as wholly and purely citizens. As Wilson put it, the “whole man” had not yet fully “come over” (New York Times 1914) and at best, Hyphenated Americans could only be perceived as 50 percent American and therefore, 50 percent citizen. Given this partial status, the legitimacy of their vote, and by extension their moral worth and public standing, must be called into question.

These concerns are illustrated in the political cartoon “The Hyphenated American” (Figure 1) where Uncle Sam, the personification of the pure, whole, and wholesome American, is shown policing hyphenated voters. The image highlights the





Figure 1. “The Hyphenated American”  
*Puck*, 1899

contrast between unified (pure) and divided (impure) groups, yet replaces the citizen/slave binarism with that of American/foreigner. Although naturalized immigrants were able to vote, a right that confirmed their civic membership (as “not slaves”), their civic character and motives (Alexander 2006) were perceived as questionable and were met with suspicion. Clothed in their hyphenation and literally split down the middle, their dress takes on an almost hermaphroditic representation (half foreigner-half American), signifying both the perceived ambivalence of their political positions as well as a national ambivalence over whether they qualified as insiders or outsiders (Garber 1992:22). Interestingly, this depiction is strikingly similar to the carnival display of “actual” hermaphrodites, whose gender ambiguity was itself often

represented through hyphenation: “Roberta-Robert, Frieda-Fred, Josephine-Joseph” (Fiedler 1978:180).

Just as the sexual hermaphrodite transgresses traditionally rigid boundaries separating the essence of male and female, the Hyphenated American, a *cultural hermaphrodite*, unfixes one-dimensional notions of nationality and citizenship. Depicted as a “divided self,” the Hyphenated American is on the margins of two worlds (Park 1928:892-93). Ethnic cultural practices, signified here in ethnically coded dress, are ultimately perceived as potentially irreconcilable with a purely American identity. After all, as Roosevelt’s 1915 speech suggests, true Americanism is “a matter of the spirit and of the soul...allegiance must be *purely* to the United States” (quoted in Davis 1920:649, emphasis added). Hyphenated voters, as “less than full” Americans, with a questionable “spirit and soul,” yet “not slaves,” are *both* American *and* foreigner. Compared with normative readings of citizenship, hyphenated voters come to be read as both/and: both pure and impure, both authentic and inauthentic, both friend and enemy. Thus, they breach the clarity between American/foreigner and risk approaching the polluted, “dreaded condition of the slave” (Shklar 1991:17), the archetype of the “not American” identity.

### *The Hyphenated Undecidable and the Anxiety of Ambiguity*

Lacking a clear civic identity, the foreigner-American makes porous the boundaries between pure/impure, citizen/slave, and friend/enemy and thus is perceived as contaminating traditionally well-ordered systems of meaning. As Douglas (1966) observes, there is the tendency for the ambiguously classified to be perceived as polluted.

Hyphenation, signaling this indeterminate status (i.e. *questionably* American, citizen, friend), becomes a cultural metaphor for this uncertainty, and the hyphenated American ultimately becomes categorized as an “undecidable” (Bauman 1991:55-59). According to Bauman, the undecidable, similar to that of Simmel’s ([1908] 1971) “stranger,” “sits astride the barricade” (1991:24), undermining not only “moral,” but also “topographical” distinctions between pure and impure, inside and outside, and near and far (1991:60). As potentially both friend and foe, for example, the undecidable disturbs the physical and cognitive distance between the “closeness of friends” and the “remoteness of enemies,” a distance that would be otherwise preserved through clear categorization (Bauman 1991:60). In this way, undecidables act as categorical “centaurs”; that is, ambiguous “composite” identities (Brekhus 2003:12) that like the mythic creature are liminal (Van Gennep 1960), “beings on the threshold” (DuBois 1991:27). As such, undecidables expose the failings of classification, and in disrupting clear distinctions, risk making the world unreadable.

In the sense that categories define the scope of one’s responsibilities (i.e. as American or foreigner, citizen or slave, friend or foe) and therefore inform knowledge and behavior, undecidables, in being underdetermined, create cognitive confusion and behavioral uncertainty for those around them. At best, this uncertainty is experienced as discomforting; at worst it is experienced as threatening (Bauman 1991:56). No longer is the safety of friends and the threat of enemies easily recognizable and in jeopardizing this distinction, the undecidable is perceived as an entity even more dangerous than the enemy. Unable to be clearly classified, the Hyphenated American is unable to be dealt with. It is this perceived unclassifiability, provoking a “failure of definitional distinction”

(Garber 1992:16) that actually prompted the Hyphenated American to become a psychological proxy for enemy invasion (Higham 1988). Particularly during World War I, the prospect of an internal menace, one that was hard to identify and lying-in-wait, was a greater source of anxiety than the more distant, yet more real threat of European forces. As Douglas suggests, danger can act as an important tool for reinforcing conventional boundaries, and one that effectively “condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications” (1966:45). In Roosevelt’s terms, this “idea” is the hyphenated “stranger within our gates” whose ambivalence will cause America to “slip into a gulf of measureless disaster” (New York Times 1915). In other words, assigning danger can be a way to stigmatize those who breach the boundaries of classification, to force those “monsters” (Zerubavel 1991:35) back into the box and to prevent any future crossing of boundaries. In this way, the possibility of harm becomes a way to denounce uncertainty, to preserve distinctive boundaries, and to make those distinctions unquestionable.

With the hyphen metaphorically designated as a threat to nation and the “hyphenated undecidable” a potential wolf in sheep’s clothing, national security was perceived as dependent on sorting out the indeterminate (“sheep” or “wolf”) and in effect sanitizing any uncertainty. A secure and prosperous America was one that could clearly determine its friends and enemies. As Garfinkel (1963) points out, violations of taken for granted cultural definitions are often automatically perceived as deceptive. Exceptions to conventional categories break down a sense of order and stability and those who fall into intermediate cultural positions provoke a fear of the *potential* for disorder and thus, are perceived as highly dangerous, particularly because their status and level of threat is

entirely uncertain. In this way, suppressing the hyphen and repressing the hyphenated comes to be constructed as a “defense of civil society” (Alexander 2006:439) and a move toward a nation “cleansed of its ambiguities” (Manuel 1965:29), a distinctly assimilationist agenda which highlighted the dangers of liminality and used the concept of threat as a tool to provoke anxiety and ultimately bring those perceived as ambiguous “under control” (Douglas 1966:ix). This takes shape in the rhetoric of “hyphen-hating,” which focused attention on the negative and dangerous consequences of hyphenation. In other words, the playing up of the ambiguity of hyphenation becomes a way to reaffirm essential, clear, and stable notions of identity. Although this resulted largely in a symbolic exile of the hyphen, crusades to reaffirm the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, discourses as a project of “dehyphenation,” did have real consequences, becoming manifested in increased immigration restrictions, deportations under the Palmer Raids, as well as the “re-education” of immigrants.

#### *A Nation Cleansed of Its Ambiguities*

With open border policies generating unprecedented population growth between 1880 and 1930, virulent anti-immigrant sentiments were justified on the grounds of national unity, cohesion, and ultimately post-war security (Higham 1988). As border figures both literally and symbolically, Great Wave immigrants were seen as an “uncontrolled force threatening political democracy...social order in the cities, and American identity itself” (Graham 2004:8). In this general landscape, national interests focused on restriction, with new policies demanding “repression, Americanization, and deportation” (Higham 1988:300) in order to restore social order. Such nationalism fueled

the impulse toward hyphen-hating, which emphasized dehyphenation and on a more extreme level, deportation. With the goal of clarifying and if necessary, containing the hyphenated masses, dehyphenation became more than just a discursive project, it also became a form of “deculturation” (Kunene 1968) and ultimately a way to force assimilation.

The Ford English School in particular, with its push for ethnic invisibility and “complete Americanization” (New York Times 1915), was a specific attempt to dehyphenate Hyphenated Americans, and by extension, disambiguate American identity. Intended to clarify and display the American loyalties of foreign-born workers, the school acted as a “conversion experience” (Sollors 1986:89), with immigrants shedding their hyphens and becoming “good Americans” (Automobile in American Life and Society 2004). In 1916 an article in the *Ford Times* described one of the graduation events (Figure 2):

In the center of the stage...was an immense cauldron across which was painted the sign “Ford English School Melting Pot.” From the deck of the steamship the gangway led down into the “Melting Pot.”...Suddenly a picturesque figure appeared.... Dressed in a foreign costume and carrying his cherished possessions...he gazed about with a look of bewilderment and then slowly descending the ladder in the “Melting Pot,” holding aloft a sign indicating the country from which he had come...representatives of each of the different countries...filed down the gangway into the “Melting Pot.” From it they emerged dressed in American clothes, faces eager with the stimulus of new opportunities.... Every man carried a small American flag in his hand (Ford Times 1916a, cited in Sollors 1986:89-90).

Although, as Werner Sollors notes, there have been many interpretations of the trope of the melting pot, the Ford School rituals locate assimilation, discourses as dehyphenation, in a “redemptive context” (1986:86). Perceived as having ambivalent loyalties, hyphenated immigrants were not only seen resistant to assimilation, but as



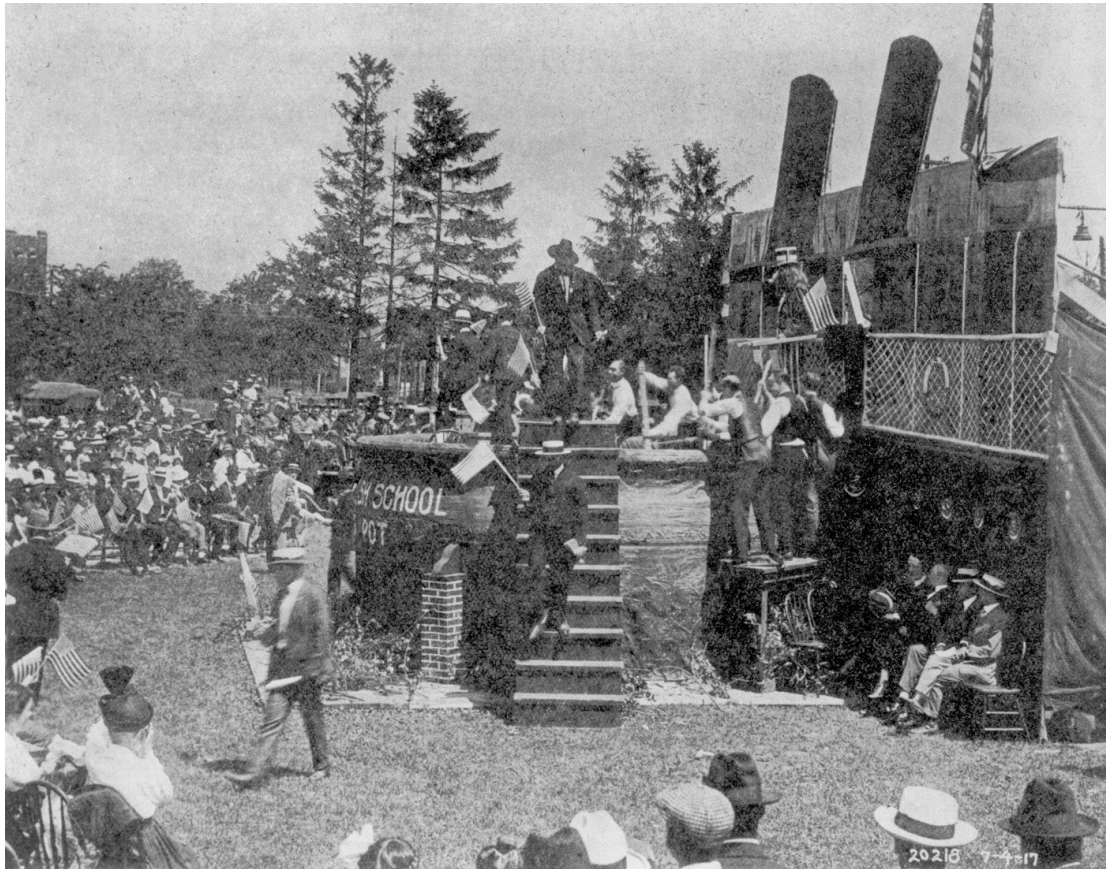


Figure 2. “Melting Pot Ceremony at Ford English School”  
From the Collections of The Henry Ford, 1917

specifically as polluted, and therefore also as requiring purification. The “baptismal blessings” (Sollors 1986:89) of the melting pot symbolically reconstituted their status, washing away their “original sin” (the hyphen) and moving them from a state of shabby bewilderment to prosperous stability. The symbolic display was intended to segregate profane, hyphenated identities from sacred, unhyphenated American identities and the Melting Pot itself marked the liminal stage, a rite of passage designed to dis-locate hyphenated undecidables and then re-locate them as unquestionable Americans (Van Gennep 1960:1). Unlike the both/and representation of clothing in the “hyphen vote” image, where the emphasis is on the ambivalence of Hyphenated Americans, the

identities here are clearly differentiated through *either* ethnic *or* American clothing. Compartmentalizing the identities in this way allows them to be perceived as distinct and unambivalent, and makes it possible for the hyphenated ethnic to be rediscoursed as American. Ultimately, the immigrants are “reborn” American and are distanced from their previous, hyphenated lives, “for they are taught at the Ford School that a hyphen is a minus sign” (Ford Times 1916b, cited in Sollors 1986:91): both morally negative and something to be subtracted. The Melting Pot ritually purifies this “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966:50), making the “hyphenated cargo” (Ford Times 1916b, cited in Sollors 1986:91) socially invisible and in effect, melting the hyphen and all of its ambivalence. In this sense, purity becomes the counternarrative to ambivalence (Zerubavel 1991:37).

Situated in a belief that hyphenated immigrants could be culturally trained to drop their hyphens and thus could be clearly categorized, this purification ritual of dehyphenation also dramatizes the larger national reform impulse of cultural gardening (Bauman 1991:20): sorting out the good from the bad and cultivating the skills and attitudes deemed necessary for pure Americanism. Hence, the phrase “I am a good American” was the first thing that Ford School initiates learned how to say (cited in Higham 1988:247-48). The goal of socializing institutions like the Ford School, and in general the goal of the State, was to spread this “spirit of true Americanism” (Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine 1922) and its 100-percent philosophy. Immigrants were obligated to choose their loyalties unambiguously, to “repudiate all duality of intention,” and to be “absolutely undivided” (New York Times 1915).

Within this either/or vision of citizenship, ambivalence is not only particularly resistant to purity and therefore a significant violation, but it must also be eliminated. For



immigrants that could not be purified, those still valuing “Hyphenism” over Americanism, new methods became necessary. As Bauman notes, within the political realm, “purging ambivalence” often means “segregating and deporting” undecidables (1991:24), and despite the ideological tension between nativistic and democratic national values, the crusade for national solidarity became a campaign of repression and deportation. Where the Ford School sought to purify ambivalent loyalties and cultivate 100-percent sentiments through a cultural project of dehyphenation, the Palmer Raids, for example, sought to contain and ultimately eradicate those with hyphenated tendencies, what became (re)discoursed as “alien radicalism” (Higham 1988).

Although there is debate over how many actual deportations took place during this time, fear of the hyphen and its uncertain effects on the sympathies of immigrants fueled a “feverish spirit” of repression (Higham 1988:247). Unlike the goals of civic education, the national phase of hyphen-hating that was marked by restriction and deportation was not intended to manufacture Americans. Instead, the goal was to contain the “infection” (Higham 1988:262). This “contagion mentality” (Zerubavel 1991:36-37), reinforced by post-war concerns for national unity and stability, provided both the momentum for the pursuit of hyphenated radicals as well as for the legislative support needed for deportation and sedition laws. Roosevelt himself, who was once called “the clear-eyed detester of shams” (not surprisingly a direct contrast to ambiguity), forewarned that social and industrial order might be destroyed by “mischievous” hyphenates left alone to “drift” (Matthews 1916). The continued presence of Hyphenated Americans, particularly those who might slip between the cracks, was essentially a reminder of the potential inadequacy of the government to keep the country safe from the

uncertain. Although some Hyphenated Americans may have engaged in subversive acts, for most, their offense was simply their ambivalent both/and status. Therefore, containment was in reality a “declaration of war on semantic ambiguity, on [the] over- or under-determination of qualities. It was a manifesto of the ‘either/or’ dilemma...More importantly still, it was a bid on the part of one section of society to exercise a monopolistic right to provide authoritative and binding meanings for all – and thus to classify sections...that ‘did not fit’ as *foreign* or *not sufficiently native*, out of tune and out of place” (Bauman 1991:105, emphasis in original) and thereby needing to be put back where they belonged (Zerubavel 1991:36). Keeping order thus came to mean not just clarifying ambivalence, but also “suppressing and exterminating everything ambiguous” (Bauman 1991:24).

### **The Discourse of Double Origins**

The fact that both/and discursive arrangements have often been perceived as ambivalent is critical to understanding the cultural development and politics of the hyphenated ethnic. As the political cartoon I mentioned earlier illustrates, the Hyphenated American identity, by embodying a complicated dual nature, unsettles binaries that would otherwise be straightforward. Ambivalently contrasted with both the “solid/solidified” American (Brody 2008) and that of the “not American,” it becomes unclear which “side” hyphenated Americans are on because, according to the cartoon, they embody both. As the United States grappled (and still continues to grapple) with clarifying an official American identity classification, the hyphen often becomes cast as a kind of stigma, resulting in a least “social deportation” (Zaal et al. 2007:171), if not actual deportation.

Hyphen-hating and the drive toward de-hyphenating the hyphenated American is as much about confronting ambivalence (and the anxiety it provokes) as it is about making clear the distinction between American and not American. After all, in the setting of the United States, American is a concept that “cannot stop making sense” (Gamson 1997:194).

It is, of course, the case that renderings of hyphenation have not been limited to civic gatekeepers. As I mentioned earlier, hyphenation has also been employed (and debated) as a signifier for ethnic difference, and this has very much included ethnics who themselves engage with the hyphen, its history, and its politics in ways that have also highlighted ambivalence and ambiguity. Even those who claim both an ethnic and American identity have recognized the stigma of the hyphenated signifier. On one hand the hyphen has been embraced by ethnics as a space of identity possibility, to voice multiple cultural selves, and as a way to resist the “pull toward normative integration” (Brody 2008:104). On the other hand, given the hyphen’s historical roots, hyphenators also often approach it cautiously. Even when they use the hyphen to express their ethnic identification, many hyphenators simultaneously admonish it as a mark of never-ending “bondage and separation” (Gatzouras 2002:176) that keeps ethnics at a “hyphen’s length” (Tamburri 1991) from mainstream culture. As Sandra Gilbert expresses, for example, her Italian-American hyphenation and “hyphen-nation” sometimes makes her feel “confused and tentative” (1997:52). As she puts it, “I eat hyphenated food, sleep and dream among hyphens, and in a sense am a walking, talking hyphen” (Gilbert 1997:52). Yet she does not reject the hyphen. Instead, Gilbert sees her hyphenation as a gateway to being an insider, to a “sometimes lost, sometimes found” (1997:52) ancestral land and history that is at the very least “eternally desired” (1997:57). Using the hyphen allows her to

acknowledge her cultural roots. Despite discourses that frame the hyphen as a fractured and fracturing mark, as incompatible with cultural pressures toward a discrete, unified identity, it has also been discourses by ethnic hyphenators as the “wish” (Petchesky 1979), if not the ability, to be culturally both “here” and “there” (Visweswaran 1994:116). In this way, the Hyphenated American is at once rendered an imposed, sometimes exoticized and fetishized category and at once a subversive undercurrent between identity assimilation and resistance.

Such a “discourse of here and there,” a discourse of double origins, has very much been the discourse around which nationalist sentiments of hyphen-hating have taken shape and has been translated as dangerous. But it is also this same discourse that has marked understandings of the hyphen from within American ethnic communities and has led it to be (re)appropriated by ethnic hyphenators, albeit ambivalently. Unlike the concepts of origin and the originary that Bhabha and other postcolonialists criticize, the discourse of *double* origins recognizes the “difficulty inherent in unifying differences under a [monolithic] national sign” (Brody 2008:97) and tries to make sense of that difficulty without fully rejecting a cultural sense of origin. For Visweswaran, who is critical of the hyphen, yet recognizes herself as a “hyphenated ethnographer,” the hyphen at least “retains the imaginary” of origin (1994:116). In marking off the parameters of membership, boundaries, whether symbolic or territorial in the case of the nation-state, often provide answers to questions like “who are you/we” and even “what are you/we” (Nagel 1994). Such questions of origin, which “help articulate identities” (Zerubavel 2003:101), have often been defined specifically by national boundaries, conflated with the concept of nation, and operationalized as both geographically and culturally fixed

(Caglar 1997; Bhatia and Ram 2004). As Visweswaran suggests, “questions of origin pose questions of return” (1994:115) and these questions are not so easily answered for the hyphenated ethnic, who may have only a displaced sense of origin or as in the case of children of immigrants, a geographically and temporally distant, uncertain sense of “over-there” (1994:118). Gilbert refers to this as the “mysteries of origin” (1997:53). Given this, the hyphen can provide a kind of narrative bridge through which the hyphenator can articulate their experience. Although cultural renderings of home and belonging are always already problematic given colonial, postcolonial, and diasporic histories, the hyphen becomes used as a unique symbolic “contact zone” (Hermans 2001), an attempt by hyphenators to bridge identities that may be “cracked by multiple migrations,” lands, languages, roles, or generations (Alexander 1993:2).

Simply put, ethnic hyphenators may embrace a hyphenated identity inasmuch as it is perceived as providing space for individuals to feel connected to more than one cultural self (Sirin and Fine 2007; Zaal et al. 2007). Through the hyphen, selves “born out of broken geographies” can symbolically make a move toward an uneasy synthesis of sometimes distant immigrant histories and present context (Bhatia and Ram 2004:224). In their interviews with Muslim-American youth, for example, Selcuk Sirin and Michelle Fine found that participants continuously engaged in a psychological reconciliation of their “hyphenated selves” (2007:160), in which some participants expressed an active refusal to separate the “currents of Islam and America,” yet at the same time wanted to “recognize the distinct pools of water from which they gather” (2007:157). Some participants also expressed the tension and contradiction that living at the hyphen, or “belonging to multiple places,” can cause, including feelings of being “split” (Sirin and

Fine 2007:159-160). Being culturally and contextually both “here and there” means that previous notions of origin – and original and originating identities – do not apply.

Instead, the double and often liminal experience that these participants expressed is a counternarrative to the settled, true, pure, authentic, and unambivalent identity.

This is not unlike the double movement that Alexander (2006) mentions, in which hyphenation is read as “radically ambivalent” (Hussain 1989:10) with multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings. The discourse of double origins in which the hyphen is entrenched highlights a moment in which union and separation, locatedness and displacement, and belonging and not belonging “can occur with potentially equal force” and are kept in dynamic play at once (Gatzouras 2002). The implication of a such a double identity and the theme of duality echoes on one level Park’s (1928) notion of the marginal man and on another level becomes, as some have argued, the “syntactic equivalent” (Jones 1997:30) to Du Bois’s ([1903] 1973) notion of double consciousness. For ethnics in particular, a near or distant immigrant history may leave them on the “margins of two cultures” (Park 1928:892) as well as situated in “the realm in-between” (Trinh 1991), not fully one identity or the other, yet most certainly both.

It is important to note, however, that a concept of double origins should not be confused as dichotomous. As Bhatia and Ram (2004) point out, at least *three* cultural voices are at play; for instance, in the case of “Indian-American,” “Indian,” “American,” and “Indian-American” voices are being constantly negotiated, mediated, suppressed, and activated by cultural politics and histories as well as personal and community experiences. Rather than dichotomizing, the hyphen can represent a more multidimensional, very “unsettling encounter” (Rutherford 1990:10) of origins on the

threshold of “here and there, past and present, homeland and host land, self and other” (Bhatia and Ram 2004:237). Given this complexity, Bhatia and Ram (2004) suggest that hyphenation might be best understood from a dialogical and polyphonic perspective. While the duality of hyphenation foregrounds a sense of simultaneity, “here and there,” a dialogical approach extends this simultaneity to “a back and forth movement between different voices” (Bhatia and Ram 2004:229), a kind of “mobile diaspora” (Visweswaran 1994:116). That is, more along the lines of “here and there and back again.”

Likewise, such a dialogical conceptualization also recognizes the sometimes shifting “weight” of the hyphen, which Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1994) and Vicky Gatzouras (2002) liken to a seesaw. This is illustrated by Gilbert’s (1997) experience of cooking pasta in Italy with “real Italians.” When the “real Italians” suggest that Gilbert, as an Italian-*American*, knows nothing of “being Italian,” she begins to understand the weight of her hyphen differently, as more heavily leaning toward her American identity and away from her Italian identity. If, however, Gilbert were to instead make pasta in the United States for non-Italian friends, her self-experience might be very different: the weight of her hyphen might more heavily lean toward her Italian identity. Thus, given this shifting weight and the contradictions of her experiences, Gilbert’s hyphenated identities are neither unitary nor completely fixed, instead being produced through their dialogical relationship to one another, and given cultural forces and context, not always in agreement (Bhatia and Ram 2004:230). Understanding the hyphenated identity as dialogical then, not only allows for these contradictions of experience, but also recognizes that such contradictions, however disorienting they may sometimes be, are nonetheless “symbiotic” (Bhatia and Ram 2001:306), representing a complex interplay

between both sides of the hyphen. In this sense, as Bhatia and Ram (2004) suggest, a dialogical perspective ultimately recognizes that conflicting, ambivalent, and shifting understandings of identity do not need to evolve into solidified, universal, and singular forms – or in the case of dehyphenation, do not need to dissolve. Rather than seeing identity as “product,” which implies a fixed, terminable, and essential category, identity should always be understood as “process,” interminable, animated, and dynamic (Bhatia and Ram 2004:238).

The discourse of double origins has also foregrounded the hyphenated identity’s ambivalent cultural position betwixt and between the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity. Although the concept of “double” rejects notions of the discrete and singular, the concept of “origin,” as I mentioned earlier, still “retains the imaginary” (Visweswaran 1994:116). Likewise, although “here and there” may signal an ambiguous cultural location (how is it possible to be in two places, both temporally and geographically, at once?), “here” and “there” are nonetheless fixed points that continue to theorize culture as anchored and discrete (Caglar 1997:169). This has been the inherent contradiction of hyphenation, inasmuch as it may interrupt concepts of an essential identity it never slides completely into ambiguity. After all, it is a hyphenated *identity*. In this way, though it is often poised as a challenge to essentialist notions of identity, hyphenation has also sometimes been a way for hyphenators to make a move toward essentialism or essentialism-in-the-making. Author Jumpa Lahiri, for example, always apprehensive about growing up both Indian and American, suggests that the term “Indian-American” provided her with the building blocks for narrating her identity. She writes, “If asked about my background, I use the [hyphenated] term myself, pleasantly



surprised that I do not have to explain further. What a difference from my early life, when there was no such way to describe me, when the most I could do was to clumsily and ineffectually explain” (Lahiri 2006). Lahiri’s own essentializing of what she calls her “two dimensions,” the self-evident nature of an identity that requires no explanation, is contrasted by the discomfort of not being able to “name” herself unambiguously (without explanation). The hyphenated identity provides an opportunity for this naming, the ability to claim a cultural identity and the genealogical legacy that goes with it, and an answer to the question, “who am I?”

Similarly, in Mita Banerjee’s analysis of her own hyphenation and the legacy of Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1981) *This Bridge Called My Back*, she admits that she strives to get “as close to authenticity” as possible (2002:119), experiencing a “nostalgia for something [she] has never quite known” (2002:124). Yet at the same time, as Banerjee recognizes, the essentialist concept of authenticity has been co-opted by ethnics through notions of the “palatability” and even “hipness” of hyphenation, specifically, the playing up of one side of the hyphen (2002:118). This “new” authenticity means, generically speaking, ethnic, multicultural, and exotic. If you don’t have a “there,” then you’re “nowhere.” Such “ethnically definite terms” (Banerjee 2002:122), those defined by stereotypes of difference and the privileging of cultural hybridity, rely on the cultural politics of identity as much as those who make claims to pure and original identities. In fact, such valorizing can become just a “toned-down” version of the hyphen as threat – “exotic rather than threatening” (Banerjee 2002:123). Banerjee, like Lahiri, is in-between these discourses: on one hand undecidable and unreadable, and on the other

hand, identified (and identifiable), translated, and exoticized, provoking an anxiety masked as fascination.

### *Riding the Hyphen*

The experience of “here and there” and by extension, the use of the hyphen, has of course been very different for second-and third-generation immigrants than for first-generation immigrants. For first-generation immigrants in particular, the cognitive connection to the homeland may be more pronounced and cultural differences between home and host land, like language and food, are often more distinct. This may mean that one side of the hyphen is experienced as more salient than the other (as having more weight) and thus, these “new” immigrants may be less likely to embrace hyphenation, adhering instead to the familiarity of the “Old World.” This has also been true during moments when cultural difference is highly stigmatized and particularly with later generations of immigrant groups, who have tended to reject ethnic or hyphenated identifications, instead trending toward self-identifications as “just American” (New York Times 2002). Of course, this identification of “just American” is not available to all ethnics, nor is it always desired.

As Isabelle Furth notes, the “force with which [the hyphen] adheres” must be understood alongside the force with which it has the potential to be “dropped” (1994:305). Given the Great Wave development of the hyphenated identity and the subsequent push toward dehyphenation, marking identities with the hyphen has been perceived by some ethnics as a step in the process of assimilation, at once a process of othering through cultural difference and a push away from one’s ethnic identity, an

identity on the margins, and toward the center. This process is intended to create an eventual dropping of the hyphen and ultimately a dismantling of ethnic identification and acceptance into the mainstream culture. Although such dropping may in fact be imposed, as in the case of pushing hyphenated groups toward assimilation through stigmatizing them, it is also important to understand that not all hyphens are created equal, for not all ethnic groups are able to drop the hyphen, nor is it always their choice to claim it in the first place (Visweswaran 1994). As Ruth Frankenberg (1993) recognizes, boundaries of cultural difference, like those that the hyphen marks, have been more permeable for “white ethnic” groups. This has meant the hyphen more readily drops out of white European immigrant identities, while continuing to mark the identities of people of color, regardless of generation (Furth 1994; Golash-Boza 2006). For Furth (1994), this asymmetrical process of dehyphenation, means that less marked groups can more readily and inconspicuously take their place in the “center,” of their own volition, while others are forced to cling to the margins. Not only does whiteness more often escape hyphenation, but many scholars argue that for the white ethnic, the hyphen becomes optional rather than ascribed (Waters 1990).

Of course, this marking of cultural difference has certainly changed over time. Likewise, despite claims regarding their essential nature, the boundaries around which a “just American” is defined have also shifted. During Great Wave immigration, as I mentioned earlier, European immigrants who might be considered white ethnics today were read as hyphenated and “questionably essentially” American, while black, Asian, and Latino/a immigrants were seen as unquestionably *not* American and therefore not hyphenated. As the politics of immigration have changed and descendents of European

immigrants have become temporally removed from their ancestors – and some would argue, “whitewashed” – hyphenation has been taken up as a form of racial marking (Golash-Boza 2006). Notions of a homeland or land of origin/return, on which claims to ethnicity are often based, are particularly problematic in the African-American context, for example (Visweswaran 1994:116), yet African Americans as well as other groups who appear to be non-white are more likely to be defined as hyphenated. This foregrounds a couple of issues. If the Hyphenated American has tended to be associated with the *ethnic* American, the dropping out of the hyphen for white ethnics signals an assumption that equates white with being un-ethnic and therefore, unmarked and unambivalent “just American” (Frankenberg 1993) and conversely, that equates unambivalent “just American” with being white (Golash-Boza 2006). It is this racialization of the hyphen and the social contrast of markedness and unmarkedness (Brekhus 1998:35) that plays out in debates like the Arizona immigration law.

Consider the cognitive asymmetry in understandings between the U.S.-Mexican border and the U.S.-Canadian border. Such distinctions are reflected in the territorial borders between the countries, where the border between the United States and Canada has been perceived as relatively unmarked (Brekhus 1998), as evidenced by its lower security level compared with the U.S.-Mexican border, which has been perceived much more contentiously. The presence of Canadian citizens in the United States (stereotypically perceived as white, despite Canada’s ethnoracial diversity) also remains unmarked, whereas notions about Mexico and Mexicans on the other hand, put them in “different symbolic positions in the nation and have for them different consequent functions” (Williams 1989:430). This applies as much to Mexican citizens as it does to

Mexican immigrants and even Hispanics, Chicanos, or Latinos who are American-born. As Ong explains in her analysis of cultural citizenship, “hegemonic ideas about belonging and not belonging in racial and cultural terms often converge in state and nonstate institutional practices through which subjects are shaped” (1996:738). The Arizona law, similar to national rhetoric that has historically labeled immigrants as hyphenated, targets individuals that do not “fit” a specific (unmarked) profile of the “just American” identity, which is often consolidated with whiteness. This profile, including binary distinctions of who counts as citizen/non-citizen, legitimate/illegitimate, legal/illegal, and insider/outsider, is closely tied to notions of how one properly “does” (see West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995) American citizenship and relies heavily on a concept of ethnoracial essence (Zerubavel 2012:55-57). Of course, the transnational reality of Mexico and the United States, as well as the fact that Hispanics are often perceived as neither black nor white, makes these kinds of rigid assessments less clear (Perea 1997; Lamont and Molnar 2002) and challenges homogenizing policies like the Arizona law that nonetheless treat them as if they were unambiguous. In reality, not only are the physical borders between nation-states permeable, but also the boundaries around these identities, not the least of which is illustrated in the difficulty of the law to distinguish and sort out *both* Mexican *and* American identities. The Arizona law reflects a moment in which a rigid logic regarding identity meets a more ambiguous reality. “In other words, the point of difference becomes uncertain” (Gilbert 2005:67).

Because being seen as *unhyphenated*, that is, “*unquestionably essentially*” American, ultimately means being read as unambiguously white then, many ethnics have

had an uneasy relationship with the concept of a hyphenated identity. Ethnic critics of hyphenation have not only argued that ethnic hyphenation is a “form of ghettoization” (Mukherjee 1991) and racial profiling, but also that “any term yoked to ‘American’ implies inevitable assimilation of the lesser entity into the more powerful ‘America’” (Allaston 2007:127). In this way, hyphenation has been perceived by some ethnics as a mark of subordination, the terms of which are decided by those who have the power to read and interpret it (Bhatia and Ram 2004). At the same time, other ethnic scholars including Pérez Firmat (1994), who himself identifies as having a “life on the hyphen,” have argued that hyphenation takes on an “appositional,” rather than oppositional state, and therefore it is ultimately impossible to determine which side of the hyphen is more salient, more influential, or more privileged. As much as some ethnic groups have argued that the hyphen and its politics of assimilation should be heavily avoided, other groups have not only used the concept of hyphenation to express their liminal experience, but also specifically as a way to reject assimilation, while at the same time making a claim to being on the inside; that is, American. This is similar to what Spivak (1993) calls “riding the hyphen,” a potentially subversive phenomenon in which one maintains, even foregrounds one’s cultural hyphenations and ambivalences, rather than allowing oneself and one’s cultural voice and interests to be made invisible. Riding the hyphen becomes an intentional way of constructing one’s identity as both/and, as claiming an ethnic identity and history without giving up claims to an American identity, and perhaps even insisting that the hyphen is always already embedded in the construction of all identities, including American-American (Gilbert 1997:52). As Brody puts it, those who ride the hyphen “revise debates about hyphens by insisting upon respect for difference(s). They

seek to foster hyphenation in order to resist forms of integration that are read as ahistorical and are always already complete as well as a priori priorities. As such, they imagine the hyphen as an ever-present entity that acts to de-essentialize and re-member histories” (2008:107). From this perspective, claiming a hyphenated ethnic identity becomes a strategy through which to create continuity between past and present, to resist being subordinated, to refuse to be erased, and to insist on one’s cultural interests being visible.

The meaning of Hyphenated Americanism and the use of hyphenation by ethnics then, has clearly been a highly complex and ambiguous phenomenon. Although many academic critics have drawn attention to the hyphenated ethnic identity as a “move toward the center” (Visweswaran 1994:119), I argue that its meaning has taken a more complicated path, shaped by competing and contested discourses that certainly include the politics of assimilation, but that also involve resistance to them. Moreover, popularized by political leaders in the first part of the twentieth century as a “malodorous title” (Steiner 1916:6), the Hyphenated American label seemed to keep Great Wave ethnics in a holding pattern, away from the center rather than moving them toward it. In fact, it was only in their willingness to drop the hyphen that they could make a move toward “just Americanism.” And it is this history that contemporary ethnic hyphenators must share, for even those who ride the hyphen today must ultimately contend with the cultural discourses that have come to shape understandings of hyphenation, specifically its contrast with cultural values like unity and singularity. In other words, while on the one hand Hyphenated American labels can be used by ethnics to articulate multiple cultural, geographic, or linguistic experiences, these labels have also been historically

implicated in a more rigid cultural logic that has tended to produce discourses of anxiety and stigma. In this sense, the relationship between ethnicity and hyphenation is a complex and shifting one, open to negotiation, and “born over and over again” (Trinh 1991:159), but also not one that is entirely “free” (Visweswaran 1994:11). This has meant that the hyphen sometimes continues to be read as perpetuating ethnic marginality, as a continuing symbol that one does not belong (Golash-Boza 2006). At the same time, because it tends to resist static and singular categories, it has also been renegotiated as a way for ethnics to “play on the hyphenated divide” (Brody 2008:102), as a way to celebrate cultural difference from mainstream America, and even as a kind of “ethnic option” (Waters 1990).

In this way, the fact that the hyphen can be seen by some as negative and by others as positive, as well as sometimes both negative and positive at the same time, is a nod to its ambivalent predicament. Clearly, to say that ethnic hyphens should be read as either “scarring tethers” or “axes of transformation” (Furth 1994:47) is much too reductive. As much as they have been used to construct identity, they have also been used to deconstruct it; as much as they have allowed for feelings of ethnic revival and ancestral continuity, they have also disputed the very terms on which these concepts rest. To see the hyphen as either a “wound of difference” (Furth 1994) or a “magic staff” (Gatzouras 2002) ignores its complex history, as well as processes that impose difference, intentionally play it up, or attempt to erase it. As evidenced by the discourse surrounding the construction of the Hyphenated American and the performative flux of those who claim a hyphenated condition, the hyphenated ethnic identity “cannot be slotted or fitted into either the category of being fully assimilated or being separated from the ‘American



culture’” (Bhatia and Ram 2004:237). It can wound, scar, and heal all at the same time (Furth 1994:48). The point of the hyphenated ethnic identity then, is not whether it should be embraced or exorcised, but rather the point is that the hyphen highlights a moment where this does not need to be resolved.

## Chapter 4

### The Surname Hyphenator

In this chapter, I examine another hyphenated identity, that of the surname hyphenator. While the previous chapter focused more exclusively on the hyphenated identity as a collective group identity, this chapter looks at hyphenators whose understandings of hyphenation and identity take place more at the individual level. Despite this difference, name hyphenators, like ethnic hyphenators, often similarly read hyphenation as a contact zone for multiple and sometimes competing interests, needs, and voices. Moreover, name hyphenators must also similarly contend with hyphen-hating discourses, shaped in this case around the divisive effects of hyphenation on marriage and family. Unlike the use of hyphenated surnames in other countries, particularly Great Britain where hyphenation has historically been used for showing class status and rights of inheritance, it emerged in the United States primarily as a reaction against marital customs and laws (Augustine-Adams 1997). Historically, when a woman married, her possessions and her social rights belonged to her husband and within this patriarchal context she automatically took her husband's surname (Gooding and Kreider 2010). In fact, although hyphenated surnames gained popularity among women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the legal right of women to make an alternative naming choice was not granted until the late 1970s (Stannard 1977). Prior to that, married women who used a name other than their husband's could not register to vote, get a driver's license, or get paid (Augustine-Adams 1997). Yet even with contemporary legal protections and increased gender

equality in general, expectations and attitudes toward marital naming have been slow to change. In a 2009 study, not only did 70 percent of respondents feel strongly that women should take their husband's names, but roughly half of respondents believed it should be government mandated (Hamilton, Geist and Powell 2009).

Thus, although name hyphenators themselves have generally seen hyphenating as a positive-to-neutral event (Foss and Edson 1989), family members or even the general public on the other hand, may not perceive it as positive. In part this may be linked to the fact that hyphenated names are often misperceived as always resulting through marriage. Surname hyphenation may have initially evolved as an alternative option for married women, similar to the concept of "Ms.," but contemporary uses of surname hyphenation have certainly extended beyond married women. In fact, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, the respondents I interviewed included children who were given hyphenated names as well as individuals who chose to hyphenate with both parents' names later as adults. In addition, not all respondents who hyphenated at marriage were women. This included one married gay male respondent and one married heterosexual male respondent. Considering the history of marital names in the United States, the fact that men do not typically change their names, as well as the fact that roughly 90 percent of married women take their husband's names and do not hyphenate (Brightman 1994), it is perhaps not entirely surprising that anything perceived as a nontraditional choice would produce some level of cultural anxiety. Surnames, particularly marital names, have been heavily guarded and highly political. Yet I argue that the disputes provoked by hyphenated surnames has been distinct in two ways.

First, reactions have encompassed more than just its nonconventional nature, and instead have often focused on the hyphen itself. In other words, cultural sentiments evoked by this naming option have often called attention to the perceived *ambivalence of hyphenated names* beyond their deviation from norms. Despite any differences in how hyphenated respondents came to have a hyphenated name, they expressed similar both/and understandings of hyphenation, particularly as a way to deal with the complexities and nuances of their family identities. For them, the hyphenated name stands in contrast to single name forms, which would require an either/or choice, including forms that use two *unhyphenated* surnames, which as respondents pointed out are often reduced to a single surname because they are “untethered.” In particular, like the perceptions of hyphenation within national identity, both name hyphenators as well as those “reading” their hyphenation have similarly perceived the hyphen as related to ambivalence. For instance, hyphenators themselves often highlight their own conflicted feelings toward expectations of naming and the presumed naturalness of singular family identity forms, questioning not just social norms, but also specifically identity representations that they deem as inconsonant with their sense of self. The hyphenated form allows them to defer to traditional naming, while at the same time challenging it. They negotiate the constraints of available either/or naming forms by rearticulating those forms in a way that meets their own needs. In this sense, hyphenators attend to normative cultural schemas of naming, yet at the same time, guided by their own personal trajectories, they go “off script.” The move toward hyphenating not only reflects the ambivalence that they experience around naming and family identity, but also indicates that the practice of hyphenating can be an improvisational attempt to “organize” the

ambivalence by allowing for it. In the hyphenated form, it does not need to be resolved. Thus, rather than present their family identity in such either/or terms (e.g. as either “keeping” or “changing” their name and thus their family membership), surname hyphenators draw on the hyphen to articulate a both/and conceptualization of their identities and family circumstances.

Second, hyphenated names are marked in a way that other nontraditional choices, such as “keeping” one’s birth name or even “blending” names, are not. The visibility of hyphenation, what Forbes et al. refer to as its “highly salient” nature (2002:172), puts it more heavily in the line of fire, to the extent that it is sometimes targeted as a sign of the dissolution of family unity. This has often meant that the surname hyphenator, similar to the concept of the Hyphenated American, has evoked sentiments involving notions of danger and warning. Whereas the hyphen within American national identities has been perceived as “threat to nation,” the hyphen within American surnames has taken on meaning as “threat to family.” For example, numerous online discussion forums warn readers of “hyphenated broads,” sometimes even imploring them to beware of the “red flag” of the hyphen (“Stay Away from Hyphenated Broads” 2009; “Hyphenated Names? Is That Disrespectful?” 2010), which itself has been a symbol culturally associated with high alert, violations, threats, stop points, and even Communist efforts. From this perspective, the hyphen marks “danger ahead,” signaling the trouble, risk, or even unsuitability of hyphenators.

In addition, the anxiety that surname hyphenation provokes often casts those who hyphenate as indecisive, untrustworthy, noncommittal, disloyal, and even androgynous (Forbes et al. 2002; Germana 2009; “Hyphenated Names? Is That Disrespectful?” 2010).

The double naming of the hyphenated surname tends to contradict American cultural values around family unity, loyalty, and even the presumed insularity and togetherness of the ideal family (Daly 2004; Sarkisian 2006). To the extent that surnames communicate family membership, hyphenation not only disrupts the clarity of who belongs, but within an historically patriarchal system, notions of ownership and the traditional entitlement of men to have wives and children named after them may also become challenged. In this way, hyphenation not only problematizes an either/or vision of family belonging and where we draw the line between families, but in “refusing to settle down” in one family or another (Trinh 1991:159), surname hyphenators also complicate hegemonic understandings of family identities and in some cases, even family and gender roles (Forbes et al. 2002).

The agenda in this chapter is two-fold: to explore the ways in which hyphenation becomes operationalized within family identity and to reveal how surname hyphenation is situated in a tension between the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity, similar to that of the Hyphenated American. This includes uncovering a similar contrast between either/or and both/and identity conceptualizations; hyphenation’s tendency toward ambivalence and undecidability; and a resulting sense of anxiety and threat that often takes shape in the peculiar phenomenon of hyphen-hating. In the analysis that follows I consider how surname hyphenators “do ambivalence” (Sarkisian 2006) and use the hyphen as a way to address their conflicting notions of what “family” (based in a community discourse) and the “self” within that family (based in a discourse of individualism), might look like. The hyphen itself is an ambivalent mark, which is what made it so appealing to the respondents I interviewed. Such a use plays out in their

interpersonal negotiations, in which respondents expressed different understandings of hyphenation relative to different groups. Their considerations of hyphenation as well as their agendas and sensitivities related to their name varied, depending on whether their concerns were related to self, birth family, partner, partner's family, children, or others, including ancestors and even institutional systems. Respondents were drawn to the functional ambivalence of hyphenation as a way to try to allow for their own cognitive ambivalence and to move toward identity-building. In this way, hyphenation again becomes situated in the politics of identity, in this case as part of process of defining self and family. At the same time, hyphenating ultimately becomes perceived as outside normative prescriptions for marriage and family and reveals a moment in which subjective understandings of self collide with social structural constraints as well as cultural expectations. This collision, which becomes both experienced and perceived (by others) as ambivalence, rejects the cultural ideal of the unambiguous family identity (Connidis and McMullin 2002; Sarkisian 2006:808). In this way, hyphenation also becomes embedded as part of the politics of ambiguity, disrupting not just boundaries of family membership, but also roles, and even understandings of (inter)generational and genealogical relations (Boss 1987; Sarkisian 2006).

### **The Middle Ground**

Just as Hyphenated Americans expose the either/or logic on which notions of national identity have relied, surname hyphenators disrupt binary notions of family and marital identity, instead highlighting a both/and conceptualization of these identities. Generally speaking, regardless of how my respondents came to have a hyphenated name,

they noted that hyphenated names have historically been rooted in traditions related to marital naming. Respondents recognized that these marital traditions typically dictate that one partner, usually the female partner, is expected to “give up” her birth name when she marries and to privilege her “new” marital identity over her previous non-marital identity. Not only does this take for granted that non-married identities are distinct and separate from married ones, but also that one identity must be discarded in order to recognize the other. This either/or framework has also been reinforced by marital name researchers, who sometimes “lump” and “split” (Zerubavel 1996) naming behaviors into one of two categories: “changers” and “keepers” (Goldin and Shim 2004). Marital hyphenators have been inconsistently lumped into *one* of these categories, yet unlike partners who change their birth names when they marry or those who keep their birth names (and do not change), marital hyphenators are fundamentally doing both. Such classifications tend to be based in understandings of these identities as singular and mutually exclusive, in which individuals are categorized as either traditional or nontraditional, but not both.

Given this framework, married respondents in particular feel that they were faced with an impossible task: to choose *either* the loss of their own name identity by changing *or* to reject their partner’s name identity by keeping. Respondents relied heavily on this language of “loss” to describe the possibility of changing, including the sense that changing meant going to “his side,” and “sacrificing,” “giving up” or “doing away with” one’s self. One respondent even went as far as to compare changing to a “master/slave” relationship and another compared it to being an “indentured servant.” Most of all, married respondents expressed concern that changing would make them “invisible,” that their sense of self, family heritage, ethnic identification, or even professional biography



might be “destroyed,” “swallowed up” or even “erased.” As one newly-married respondent explains:

If I’d changed my name, you would have a couple of publications over here and then a kind of wondering, ok, where did this person go? This person doesn’t exist any more. I think that was a big part of it for me...was this idea that you go on [the Internet] and you search for this person...and this person just doesn’t *exist at all*. It feels like it anyway.

Another respondent felt that changing her name would not only make her invisible, but would eliminate her ability to be her own person:

Beth Ross was [my parents’] daughter. The kid. Beth Danvers was a wife...part of Beth and Dennis and not a real person anymore. Beth Ross-Danvers was somebody very different. She had a life. She had experience. Beth Ross-Danvers is a very unique and different person with my own identity and my own position in society...a vital part of the community.

Similarly, respondents who hyphenated with their parents’ names as adults as well as respondents who were given hyphenated names at birth expressed a parallel understanding, often remarking that one-name forms like those of changing/keeping “sever off that [family] line” and force one family name and lineage, typically women’s, to disappear.

At the same time, although changing was perceived as losing one’s self or one’s family lineage, married respondents in particular also expressed reluctance at the idea of keeping their birth names. They indicated that keeping might communicate lack of respect for their partner and their partner’s family. Some respondents also felt that they had a responsibility to acknowledge their married status and their “new” married self, noting the value in sharing their partner’s name, which they expressed in the terms of “unity,” “union,” and “cohesion.” For respondents whose partners also hyphenated, of which there were three, changing was perceived as inequitable, while keeping was seen

as eliminating a sense of a family connection. This was particularly true for respondents with children as well as for those anticipating children. Of my 19 respondents with children, 15 respondents had children with only the father's name and of the five of my respondents anticipating children, four respondents indicated that the child would be given only the father's name. Because of this and given the "normative structure" of obligations to children (Sarkisian 2006), respondents feared that keeping, and thus having a name completely different from their children's, might result in not being legitimately perceived as the children's parent. In considering this, one respondent remarked, "With my kids I felt like it was going to be confusing or hurtful. I didn't want other kids to think that I wasn't my sons' mom."

In this sense, as my respondents suggest, hyphenation is a way to accommodate their self-understandings of identity and the interplay of that identity with, for example, their professional, community, and kin relationships. In particular, hyphenation can be a way to narratively "order the data" (Berger 1963:63) of one's biography, especially toward creating continuity between past and present. As my respondents seem to indicate, making sense of their identities (Somers 1994:606) is often connected to being able to create a "continuous self" (Zerubavel 2003:53) – a biographically coherent self-narrative that does not require the discontinuity of "severing off" nor "trading off" parts of their experience. And hyphenating is understood as a way to discursively construct this coherence, as a way to align temporally situated selves. So for example, in the respondent's concern over the impact that name changing might have on her publication record, hyphenating functions as a way to link her professional past, present, and anticipated future (Howard 2006:311). In a similar vein, through the hyphen, the pre-

married life of Beth Ross can coterminously exist with the married present and future of Beth Danvers. In other words, contrasted with either/or schemas of naming, the hyphen is used here as a narrative bridge between what my respondents see (without the hyphen) as otherwise temporally dislocated biographical moments. Likewise, the potential of the hyphen is read not just in temporal terms, but in spatial terms as well. Most particularly, the respondent's concern that name changing might make her invisible, such that she "doesn't exist at all," turns spatiality on its head. That is, her concern is one that she might be rendered spatially absent. In this sense, hyphenating becomes not just about "bridging the *temporal* expanse" (Howard 2008:38, emphasis added) of one's biography, but is also a narrative strategy toward mapping the "expanse" of one's biographical landscape – bringing oneself back into biographical space.

Such biographical concerns as well as concerns over being connected to the "multiple plots" (Somers 1994:625) of one's identity, becomes a main theme in name hyphenators' understandings of hyphenation and their rejection of either/or name forms, which they see as setting boundaries on their biographical stories and family memberships. Because family names are often one way that the boundaries between "who is in" and "who is out" of the family are shaped (Boss 1987), one-name forms, whether keeping or changing and whether in the context of a marital name or a birth name, set limits on how one's family memberships and connections are perceived. Keeping, for example, would mean being an insider to one's birth family, while making oneself an outsider to one's marital family. In this way, respondents seemed to understand changing/keeping specifically, and one-name forms generally, not simply in the terms of insider/outsider, but also as creating either closeness or remoteness in their

family connections. Keeping one's birth name would mean greater social and cognitive connection to their family of origin, but greater social and cognitive distance from their marital family, including their children. Likewise, for those who either hyphenated with their parents' names as adults or were given a hyphenated name at birth, having only a father's name was understood as facilitating greater closeness to the paternal family rather than to the maternal family. One respondent, whose birth name was his father's name, expressed that hyphenating as an adult actually became a way to express a "stronger connection with my mother's family," a connection he most strongly felt during the Christmas holiday which he often spent with his mother's family, something he wanted to continue to experience beyond the holiday season:

I feel closer with my mother's family [since hyphenating my name]. I am able to identify with them more...in terms of traditions I uphold...the traditions that are connected with my mother's family...which happen to be connected with the Norwegian and Swedish side of my heritage. You know, particularly around Christmas time, there are certain things that we do around food and around culture that we don't do throughout the rest of the year...and having that last name also preserved that connection throughout the year.

For him, hyphenating allowed him to be cognitively closer to his mother's family, despite the social distance during other times of the year. Likewise, he also speculates over the extent to which hyphenating his name to include his mother's family name may also have changed the way others perceived his connectedness, or alternatively his disconnectedness. Although he indicates that his father may have felt "slighted" by his hyphenation, his mother's family was "honored by it":

My grandfather just passed away about a month and a half ago and most of the Scandinavian things were handed down to me...so I'm not sure if that's because they feel like I have a stronger interest...or it also may have been that he wanted me to have them because of the connection that I had to him...having the same last name...it's something that my grandparents, my grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side...were actually very proud of.

In addition, for many respondents this contrast of closeness/remoteness manifested as concerns over how family assessments might be made. In particular, respondents articulated these concerns through questions of “who?” That is, respondents were concerned over whether single and unhyphenated name forms would allow others to “place” or contextualize their relationships to family members, which without the hyphenated name might result in questions like, “who are you,” “where do you fit in,” and “who is this?” As Gilbert (2005) and Bauman suggest, being able to place individuals within these clear categorical frameworks allows social actors to understand not just the nature of the relationship, but also the terms of the relationship, including the expectations and obligations involved, “so that both sides would know how to go on in each other’s presence” (1996:19). In narrative terms, people understand themselves, act, and interact not so much based on categories themselves, but rather based on the way in which these categories are “emplotted” (Somers 1994:614), how they fit into any number of given narratives, including individual ontological narratives as well as what Somers calls “public narratives” (1994:619). Not having clear answers to questions of “who” then, which respondents felt a hyphenated name provided, created a concern for respondents that they may not be able to be placed, temporally and spatially, within the context of an intelligible family “plot line” (Somers 1994:617). In other words, that their family memberships and specifically the roles associated with their family memberships might be perceived ambiguously (Boss 1987).

Such concerns over membership here extend beyond simple inclusion or exclusion; rather, they highlight the perceived importance of names in clearly defining and legitimizing their intersubjective roles as partners, parents, children, and in some

cases, even their roles in a family-specific ethnic history. In other words, respondents understand hyphenation as not just clarifying whether they were “in” or “out,” but also “how much” and “in what way” they were in (Nelson 2006). For the respondent who hyphenated as an adult with both his mother’s and father’s name, for example, hyphenating becomes a way to present a “bilateral account” (Zerubavel 2012:84) of his origins, in which he rejects the privileging of his father’s name, as well as the privileging of a single story of descent. Instead, hyphenating allows him to “braid” (Zerubavel 2012:84-86) together multiple genealogical narratives, not simply in terms of belonging to more than one family, but also as a way to more formally preserve what he sees as part of his ancestral inheritance – the traditions, memories, and emotional connection he has with his mother’s family history and his Scandinavian heritage.

In this sense, hyphenating takes on a narrative and performative dimension, in which narratives of identity, like those of my respondent above, are being actively constituted through the hyphenation itself. For my respondents here, hyphenating allows them to tell a story of their identity and family relationships, and as Somers suggests, such ontological narratives are not only used to make sense of identity – to define who we are – but also, by situating us in relation to others, allows us to orient our actions – to actually “do” this identity (1994:618). We might understand hyphenating then, as part of the interactional work of “doing family” as well as “doing identity” related to family (see West and Zimmerman 1987 and West and Fenstermaker 1995); that is, the active construction of ties to family community, boundaries, role behaviors, and a sense of an individualistic self within family (Nelson 2006; Sarkisian 2006). In fact, for hyphenators, the doing of identity and family as well as their conflicted feelings about how one’s

identity and family narratives should be told and should be read by others materializes in the hyphen. Of course, viewing identity as an interactional and narrative accomplishment extends beyond the individual experience of hyphenators and stresses the importance of how these narratives are situated in, evaluated, and held accountable (West and Fenstermaker 1995:21) by public narratives, including those shaped by prevailing normative expectations and institutional discourses. In the sections that follow, I consider not only the way in which respondents understand their identities, but also the way in which they understand these public narratives as simultaneously setting expectations for their identities, at times conflicting with their needs and self-understandings.

*Doing Ambivalence/Having It Both Ways*

In this regard, respondents tend to use hyphenation as a way to contend with and even accommodate a narrative disjuncture. Certainly they do family and identity as a way to express their own understandings of their connections, but when their understandings come in conflict with cultural expectations, they don't simply reject these expectations outright, but instead try to contend with both visions of identity. Thus, doing family and identity for hyphenators, particularly the activity of hyphenating itself, is often about "doing ambivalence" (Sarkisian 2006). Despite the fact that many of my hyphenated respondents made the choice to hyphenate, they nonetheless expressed ambivalence, including conflicted feelings about their motivations, obligations, and desires. For respondents who hyphenated as a result of marriage, for example, the desire to preserve their birth name often came in conflict with what they felt was their obligation to incorporate their partners' names. Whereas research has shown that changers often

express identity using a discourse of community, wanting to move “from a single identity to a married one” and keepers often express identity using a discourse of individualism, wanting to “stay who they are,” marital hyphenators use a “dual” discourse: taking part in a shared family name, while still acknowledging a sense of themselves as individuals (Foss and Edson 1989:362-63). Likewise, while changers have tended to privilege their relationships with their partners and children and have also tended to express deference to tradition in their naming decisions, keepers, on the other hand, have tended to prioritize self identity and see themselves as responsible for and in control of their decision (Foss and Edson 1989:367). Falling somewhere in-between changers and keepers, marital hyphenators identify strongly with *both* self and relationships. By maintaining their own names, they exhibit some sense of control, yet by not entirely rejecting tradition (by incorporating their partners’ names), they simultaneously exhibit a deference typical of changers (Foss and Edson 1989). For marital hyphenators, “who they become” at marriage and “who they were” before marriage are not temporally separate and mutually exclusive social biographies. Hyphenating allows them to “have it both ways,” remaining connected to their ancestors “in the shtetl, or the potato famine, or the decks of the *Mayflower*” without giving up a connection to their children and grandchildren (Roiphe 2004).

Even those who were given hyphenated names at birth or those who hyphenated with their parents’ names as adults expressed a similar desire to “have it both ways,” and were particularly ambivalent about whether, as one respondent articulated, the hyphen functioned as “connecting or disconnecting piece.” Another respondent echoed this, noting that he was unable to reconcile whether he understood the hyphen as necessarily



“separating,” which discourses of individualism tend to privilege, or “connecting,” which tend to be privileged by discourses of community (Baxter 2010). For my respondents, not only is the function of the hyphen marked by ambivalence, but their own ambivalent impulse toward “having it both ways” means that they are not necessarily inclined to resolve it; that is, they can understand themselves in terms of “genealogical fractions rather than unified essences” (Zerubavel 2012:84). For example, one respondent who saw her hyphenated name as linked to her family’s cultural heritage, expressed a sense of herself as being “split.” She remarked:

I never totally identified with just being Irish because there is this other [Trinidadian] family...this other piece of me...so for me it was always like, I’m split in that way. I’m not really strongly one or the other. I’m not strongly one thing.

As a “dark child among blonds,” she expresses her inability to reconcile her “dark roots” with her light-skinned and light-haired Irish relatives. For her, a hyphenated name is the “sign and the symbol of being mixed,” and like Zerubavel’s concept of “braiding” (2012:84), through the hyphen she can weave together the strands of both ethnic heritages, not needing to choose between them. Similar in sentiment to the hermaphroditic image of the Hyphenated American in Chapter 3, such an idea of being “split” is an acknowledgement of both/and ties and mixed roots.

In this sense, name hyphenators reject the idea that their identities must necessarily be shaped by an either/or logic, instead privileging a both/and conceptualization of self. This is evidenced by the language of “bothness” that surname hyphenators tend to use when describing their hyphenation. Although only one respondent specifically referred to the hyphen as a “both/and symbol,” most respondents commonly used the term “both,” as well as phrases like “joining,” “meshing worlds,”

“tethering,” “bridging,” “hooking,” and “melding together” to describe how they understood the function of the hyphen. In addition, my respondents described hyphenating using spatial imagery such as the “middle ground” and the “happy medium,” or as putting them “right in the middle” of their families and what they understood as their own cultural and genealogical histories. As one marital respondent explained it, “I wanted it one way [to keep my name], he wanted it another way [to take his name], and there was an obvious middle ground.” She continues to use the concept of the middle ground to articulate her understanding of herself as not belonging to either the keeping or changing groups, including the associations of those groups and their roles with being either traditional or nontraditional and either family-oriented or career-oriented:

I don’t really belong to the group that changed their names. I don’t belong to the group that didn’t change their names. Similarly I don’t belong to the group of stay-at-home moms...I live in this very nice middle ground that takes elements from different places and I love where I’m at and feel really lucky in both aspects to merge all this and come up with something that I feel comfortable with...that I feel like I’m not cheating my family but I’m not cheating myself in my career. I decided that I would go ahead and hyphenate because that to me was the best of both worlds. I [also] liked the idea of having a family identity...of sharing something with my children.

Although the concept of the traditional family and its normative arrangement is a powerful cultural narrative (Nelson 2006), marital hyphenators, as evidenced by my respondent above, often simultaneously express what they see as a competing desire for a self-oriented professional life – “not cheating oneself.” My respondent quoted above expresses the value of a family-focused identity, yet she rejects what she perceives as the all-consuming family-focused role: the “stay-at-home mom.” In fact, the specific reference to this *role*, which stands out from the contrast of the more vague “group that changed their names” and the “group that didn’t change their names,” seems to suggest

that such a traditional orientation might be perceived as even further away from the “middle.” Having the “best of both worlds” then, is not only an expression of ambivalence specifically in terms of these roles and traditions, but is also a way to narrate an intersectionality of competing selves, including those of partner, parent, and professional, in ways that are “neither linear nor hierarchical” (Zaal et al. 2007:174). Hyphenation becomes the way in which marital hyphenators interpret and respond to these cultural expectations and what they feel are their contradictory desires. Instead of choosing between their careers or their families, hyphenation allows them to have it both ways.

The same was also true for marital hyphenators who felt strongly attached to their families of origin and their identities before marriage. My respondents seemed to suggest that the “having it both ways” quality of hyphenating allowed them to bridge their biographies in a way that was not possible with other name choices. As one respondent remarked, hyphenating “merged my former family life with my parents and my new family life,” and another respondent similarly noted, hyphenating “allowed me to be tied to who I was, but also have this other part of my life that I was taking on.” Other respondents noted that hyphenating allowed them to be perceived as married, which they felt was a positive relational characteristic, while at the same time allowing them to keep their individuality. As one respondent remarked, “I wanted to get married, be married, have a married identity...but I didn’t want the marriage to represent all of my identity. I wanted to keep my individual ‘stuff.’” In this way, my respondents saw hyphenation as providing an opportunity for them to exist in totality, preserving and honoring the stories of their prior lives, their connections to their families of origin, and their “old” identities,

while at the same time incorporating their “new” marital families into their lives and acknowledging their commitment to the ideals of marriage. This is not unlike Wayne Brekhus’s conceptualization of identity centaurs, who allow for multiple, mixed, and multidimensional identity statuses (2003:151). As identity integrators, they see their hyphenated names as allowing them to express a “composite” self (Brekhus 2003:12), to value both old and new, both past and present, both self and other, and both themselves as individuals as well as their relationships.

### *Role Dis-Ambiguity*

For name hyphenators, “having it both ways,” is a very “practical sense-making procedure” that provides a balance between individuality and relationships (Foss and Edson 1989:365). In addition, name hyphenators seemed to understand the “bothness” of hyphenation as not only expanding the limits of either/or identities, but also as a visible way to show cohesion with their families and to clarify their connections and roles vis-à-vis other family members. Respondents tended to value this visibility as an “emphatic” way to show the relationships that they are “hooked into.” Many respondents even felt that the hyphen allowed others to “see” their roles, including their roles as parents, partners, family members, and work professionals. As one respondent explained, her legal and social relationship to her husband, children, and family of origin was made visible through her hyphenated name. Unwilling to discard her “old identity” and connection to her parents, she also recognized the importance of names for legitimizing relationships. In particular, she expresses this importance in her concern that keeping her

name, although making her connection to her birth family clear, would make her relationship to her child and even her spouse ambiguous:

There would be questions about whether you're really the parent of the child because you don't have the same last name. [Or people might think], are you divorced? So, I thought from the school's perspective they would treat the parent who didn't share the name as potentially more distant or less of a real parent to the child.

This was echoed by another respondent, who initially kept her birth name and only began hyphenating when her children first started school:

[Before hyphenating] I would go to sign in to go to [their] classroom to volunteer for something and nobody could make the connection between me and my children...they wouldn't know who I was...whose parent I was...my kids don't look anything like me and it took a while for them to figure out that oh, that face belongs with those faces, this is the person who's going to be allowed to sign the permission slip for those kids. If they can't conceptualize where you fit in this child's life and they didn't know who you were, you weren't [picking up] the child.

Hyphenating thus becomes the way in which my respondents “do family” with community concerns in mind, as a way to authenticate their relationships to their children and specifically to authenticate these relationships within institutions. This authentication was equally important for one respondent who hyphenated instead of keeping her name, in order to show the legitimacy of her marriage for immigration purposes. Despite the fact that keeping one's name is common practice in her ethnic culture, she feared that because it still tends to be outside the norm for American culture, it would “raise too many suspicions” about whether she was really her husband's wife. Because being able to clearly place individuals within roles guides interactions and appropriate levels of engagement (Sarkisian 2006), my respondents feared that without some normative indicator of their relationships to their children and partners, they would be dismissed as “less than” legitimate. In this sense, despite the ambivalence of name hyphenators,

hyphenating sometimes takes shape as a “normalcy seeking” behavior (Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004). Hyphenated names were understood as not only helping others place where respondents fit in, but also as helping to disambiguate the rights and responsibilities associated with certain roles.

Such an understanding of hyphenated names as *disambiguating* was similarly expressed as a way to maintain a sense of connectedness with not just family members, but also with a family legacy. As Kerry Daly (2001) explains, social actors mentally construct family legacies through memories, which often take shape in the form of traditions, stories, and even times of togetherness. Respondents who spoke about these legacies, or what they sometimes called their family heritage, saw hyphenating as a way to mentally integrate these traditions and a sense of the past with their roles as family members. As one respondent explained, hyphenating as an adult with his mother’s name allowed him to identify more fully as a grandson and a descendent of a Scandinavian fishing family, particularly with the stories his grandfather shared and the cultural traditions and “relics” that were used during family gatherings. Another respondent, whose parents died when she was young, explained that hyphenating her name had mnemonic significance, allowing her to both “keep the family name going longer,” and to be connected to a time when her family was still alive. She explains,

I just wanted to preserve [the name] a little longer...it gives you a sense of heritage. My mother died when I was really young and my father died when I was really young, so they really, really were gone. So the impact of that name ending was more real than it probably is to other people. And I was kind of keeping a little bit of them alive...anytime anyone says the name, it’s like they’re right here...family...and also the legacy.

For this respondent, who simultaneously valued sharing a family name with her husband, hyphenating was a mnemonic strategy that provided symbolic access to family members

that were “no longer physically accessible” (Zerubavel 2003:44). For her, hyphenating created a kind of “symbolic immortality” (Schmitt 1982; Zerubavel 2003), preserving the memory of her parents as alive and “right here” as well as her sense of herself as their daughter. In this way, the hyphenated name can be used as a “discursive token” of ties to family histories and memories (Zerubavel 2003:52), including as one respondent noted, to “the ancestors I haven’t met.”

At the same time, however, as much as name hyphenators understand hyphenation as *disambiguating*, the “having it both ways” quality of hyphenation has also meant that their social roles are at times perceived *ambiguously*, particularly with regard to gender. Although surname hyphenators “do family” in less conventional ways in order to have the best of both worlds, “doing family” necessarily requires at least some engagement with normative models of family, for which individuals and actions must ultimately be held “accountable” (West and Fenstermaker 1995:21). As Margaret Nelson (2006) points out:

Doing family involves the process of assigning rights, privileges, and responsibilities within the nexus of the web of relationships of those we call ‘family,’ a process that is assumed to arise naturally when the pattern of distributing these rights, privileges, and responsibilities relies on and duplicates preexisting notions of appropriate roles for men and women (2006:783).

Hyphenators’ own engagement with normative models takes shape as a rejection of the boundaries set by either/or forms and in their ambivalent feelings about their roles as partners, parents, children, professionals, and cultural ethnics. In particular, male hyphenators or married females who hyphenate instead of changing disrupt “preexisting notions of appropriate roles for men and women” and create what Laura Landry-Meyer and Barbara Newman (2004) call “role ambiguity.” That is, there is a lack of clear norms,

expectations, definitions, and boundaries for a role (Sarkisian 2006:806). For the most part, American cultural narratives still frame naming along normative and gendered grounds: one-name forms that privilege the husband's or father's name and in which men are typically keepers and women are typically changers. Such understandings shape the standards for the social roles of men and women vis-à-vis naming. Although my respondents expressed community-oriented concerns and used hyphenation to navigate societal expectations about clear roles and relationships, even to the extent that they recognized the importance of conforming, their individual interpretations of their roles were often in conflict with societal interpretations (Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004). Yet this is not simply about disrupting convention. It is the both/and nature of hyphenation, because it tends to reflect a continuum of possible behaviors and roles, that contributes heavily to this role ambiguity (Sarkisian 2006). In other words, because surname hyphenators are both keeping and changing, both challenging convention and engaging in it, valuing both family and career, and are demonstrating both deference and control, there is a significant amount of role ambiguity that develops, to the extent that name hyphenators are sometimes perceived as mixing the boundaries of masculinity and femininity.

As a result, the gender roles of both male and female surname hyphenators have been perceived as “androgynous” (Forbes et al. 2003). That is, female surname hyphenators tend to be perceived as more instrumental and more masculine, but not necessarily less expressive and less feminine. Likewise, although male surname hyphenators tend to be perceived as having a less masculine and more feminine gender *identity* overall, they are also perceived as being both instrumental and expressive in



terms of gender *role* (Forbes et al. 2002). By enacting both traditionally masculine (keeping) and traditionally feminine (changing) name behaviors, hyphenators disrupt the perceived mutual exclusivity of role boundaries between men and women, which puts them in the middle of what Janet Spence and Camille Buckner (2000) call the “masculinity-femininity continuum” (a concept itself hyphenated). In other words, hyphenators “behave like” men by keeping their names, but also “behave like” women by changing their names. To the extent that there is a general link between naming decisions and gender norms, the hyphen comes to represent the “diminished differences” (Zerubavel 1991:117) and increased ambiguity between men’s and women’s contemporary roles.

For married women in particular, who tend to express the most ambivalence toward traditional gender role behaviors, an androgynous perception of hyphenating might also represent a feminist-feminine “balancing act,” what Katie Roiphe (2004) calls “lipstick feminism.” Given the history of the relationship between feminist values and women’s naming, as well as the fact that more rigid forms of feminism have rejected femininity and feminine associated behaviors outright, name hyphenation is more likely than any other name form to be perceived as both feminist and feminine at the same time (Frieswick 2010). Respondents who explicitly addressed feminism, of which there were 15, tended to understand hyphenation in this way, valuing traditionally feminine traits, such as being relational and sensitive to the concerns and needs of their family, while at the same time valuing traits traditionally associated with masculine roles, such as independence, assertiveness, and career competency (Twenge 1997a; Spence and Buckner 2000). Although my respondents sometimes expressed hyphenating through

feminist narratives, to preserve an identity independent to that of their husband and marriage, they also at times expressed more conventional gender role narratives, using traditional gender ideologies about naming and marital life to inform their own naming decision. As one respondent put it, hyphenating gave her the opportunity to be other-oriented, as a “very cordial wife,” as well as self-oriented, as an “independent educator” (Baxter 2010:373).

### **The Anxiety of Ambiguity**

Straddling two “worlds” of family identification and moreover, complicating traditional gender roles, the “androgynous hyphenator” acts as a conceptual parallel to the hyphenated undecidable discussed in Chapter 3, a potentially unreadable and unclassifiable status. The liminal nature of this particular hyphen, in this case betwixt and between keeping and changing (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1967), puts into question specific categories like male/female and masculine/feminine and at the same time challenges larger cultural systems like marriage and family that have traditionally relied on these binary distinctions. Hyphenation as a name form shifts expectations about what women and men “do,” not only with regard to naming, but also about how they are expected to behave as men and women (Etaugh et al. 1999). Although social and professional gender equality has certainly increased, gender stereotyped ideals have persisted, in which women are seen as caregivers, communal, other-oriented and self-sacrificing, while men are seen as career-oriented, agentic, and self-authorizing. Neither male nor female name hyphenators are seen as fulfilling these roles in ideal-typic ways and the perceived ambiguity that tends to result has often provoked significant anxiety for

both hyphenators as well as for those around them. Despite the fact that name hyphenators often saw the unifying and disambiguating potential of hyphenation, when it comes to gender roles within the family it can often be read as potentially *disunifying* and ambiguous. Surname hyphenators themselves expressed concerns about this on various levels, including whether they would be perceived as ambivalent in their marital commitments, as well as whether their hyphenated name would blur the boundaries of their family history, related specifically to hyphenation's "double ties" and the use of a name other than their husband's, or in the case of children hyphenators, a name other than their father's.

*Questionably Committed and the Hyphen as Minus Sign*

Although many name hyphenators believe, as one respondent put it, that hyphenation creates a "visible, written connection" to children and partners, there was also a sense, particularly for female name hyphenators, that they might look less committed to their marriages and families. In this sense then, the androgynous hyphenator is not just an undecidable, but also risks being perceived as undecided about her role. Interestingly, this is not the case with male name hyphenators, who, despite being perceived as androgynous, also tend to be perceived as *more* committed (Forbes et al. 2002). Given that men may be seen as giving up more of themselves because they do not typically change their names, this is perhaps not surprising. Hyphenating may be presumed to be a bigger cognitive leap for men than for women and thus signals greater marital commitment for men. In addition, it may also be the case that because men are gender-typed as "enlightenment subjects" (Hall 1996), agentic and self-authorizing, the

decision to hyphenate may be rebranded as more in line with the perceived independence of male decision-making. As one male name hyphenator put it, hyphenating made him a “self-made man.” In this way, reactions to males who hyphenate may be moderated by gender schemas that position men as highly independent and self-sufficient in the decisions they make. In other words, through gender schemas hyphenation is reinterpreted and repackaged as more consistent with male gender-typed behavior.

For women, on the other hand, anxieties over the disruption of gender norms often result in perceptions of them as indecisive, specifically toward marital loyalty and their roles as wives. In fact, although women who depart from traditional roles generally tend *not* to be seen as “conscientious, responsible, trustworthy, and loyal,” (Forbes et al. 2002:173), for those who hyphenate it is not simply their nonconventional choice that jeopardizes the gendered order of things. Instead, these anxieties tend to be focused specifically on their ambivalence and androgynous “nature,” which the hyphen comes to represent. In other words, rather than being perceived as unambiguously *not* committed, which keeping might suggest, marital hyphenators are perceived as *ambivalent* about their commitment to their husbands, having “one-foot-in and one-foot-out” of the marital family. As one respondent recalls, this perceived ambivalence was of particular concern to her mother-in-law:

His mother was very upset. She didn’t even come to the wedding. She thought, ‘I don’t understand why [you] would do that. How can you not be *completely* dedicated to my son? You don’t want to be committed to him *fully*.’ (Emphasis added).

As this respondent suggests, the hyphen becomes overemphasized as part of the hyphenated woman’s personality and the marital hyphenator herself is perceived as *questionably* committed to her husband, and by extension, *questionably* a good wife and

mother. Being perceived in this way was a particular concern for many marital hyphenators, including one respondent who voiced her fear that even her future children might question her commitment as a wife. In anticipating a moment in which she might need to justify her hyphenation and defend her loyalty to her children, she explains, “it’s not that I loved daddy any less.” The perceived ambivalence of hyphenators ultimately makes the certainty embedded in the cultural ideal of marriage (i.e. “until death do us part”) less secure and less stable. In fact, the prospect of *not knowing* one’s level of commitment becomes a greater source of anxiety than *knowing* that one is *definitively not* committed (Higham 1988; Garber 1992). Although a marital hyphenator may *seem* committed, there exists a popular perception that the hyphen may at any moment become a “minus sign,” putting her at greater risk for divorce. Interestingly, although respondents most often saw hyphenation as form of “addition” rather than “subtraction,” some respondents did see the “practical value” of hyphenation in the event that a marriage ends, particularly given the reality of American divorce rates. One respondent, thinking retrospectively about her divorce, noted the convenience that hyphenation provided:

In order to marry you I’m supposed to give up [my identity] and take on your name and leave mine behind, but you’re not doing that same thing for me. So, I’ll keep mine and I’ll add yours. That’s what [the hyphen] means to me...adding. But it’s a convenient subtraction that the hyphen becomes a minus when you divorce. You’re subtracting...I was able to use the hyphen as a minus and drop [his name] off. It was symbolic of [the marriage] being finished.

On one hand, as this respondent suggests, the function of the hyphen as a minus sign is not unlike the function of the hyphen as a bridge. In fact, the function of the hyphen to bridge past, present, and anticipated future is clearly at play here, though it is re-discoursed in the image of a minus sign. Despite the fact that divorce may render the removal of the hyphen, according to this respondent, hyphenating provided an

opportunity to anticipate a future that might include divorce. On the other hand, coding the hyphen as a minus sign simultaneously confirms anxieties related to hyphenators' degree of marital commitment – the “purity” of their intentions is simply not known. In this regard, a reading of the hyphen as a mechanism of subtraction is not unlike how it was viewed within the context of Hyphenated Americanism, particularly through the Ford School, in which the hyphen was imagined similarly as a minus sign. Within the context of naming, although hyphenators more frequently saw the function of the hyphen as one of adding, it is nonetheless seen as subtracting and detracting from the marital relationship, to the extent that it even becomes dramatized as an outward warning sign – a red flag, signaling a potential threat to the marital family (“Hyphenated Names? Is That Disrespectful?” 2010).

*‘Wearing the Pants’ and the Feminizing Potential of Hyphenation*

Considering the fact that many men see themselves as legally responsible for women who share their names (Intons-Peterson and Crawford 1985), men may perceive that they have a vested interest not just in women's naming decisions, but in how people's perceptions of that name (as “impure,” as “threat”) will reflect on both them and the marital family. As Nathan Miller puts it, “the name *is* the man” (1927:600, emphasis in original). “Sitting astride the barricade” (Bauman 1991) between keeping and changing and moreover, perceived as questionably committed, the androgynous hyphenator cannot be trusted to “behave” as a woman “should.” To the extent that surname hyphenators are perceived as challenging traditional gender norms then, and particularly when keeping comes to imply “wearing the pants,” the male counterparts of female hyphenators may

fear being feminized. In fact, my respondents noted that their hyphenated names were often invoked by friends and family as a way to question their husband's masculinity. One respondent spoke about male friends teasing her husband by calling him by her last name. She explains, "This is a way to say to [my husband], you're not as much of a man because you love your wife too much...she has too much freedom." Similarly, another respondent spoke about how even her husband refers to himself by her last name:

He's being sarcastic that I took on [a hyphen], so we get onto the whole thing about who wears the pants in the family...meaning who is the head of the household...who makes decisions...and traditionally, it's supposed to be the man that's the head of the household...I just think it's a male macho thing that...this is my woman.

Even though, as this respondent mentions, she did "part of what [she] was supposed to do traditionally" – taking her husband's name, though "not totally" – her husband is still concerned that she might be perceived as "wearing the pants" and that he might not be seen as the head of the household. In other words, surname hyphenators are not only making their own gender role orientation ambiguous, but also potentially that of their partners. The presence of an androgynous figure means that the boundaries between roles in the family are made ambiguous and thus, the roles of *both* men and women can no longer be taken for granted. Because categories like gender are rigidly defined and rely on unambiguous categorical distinctions, any "confusion" between gender roles is likely to become a significant source of anxiety (Zerubavel 1991:47).

This feminizing potential of hyphenation also emerged in discussions with the one married gay respondent in the sample. Because both partners hyphenated, concerns were not raised about hyphenation per se, but rather about the order of names in the hyphenated form. That is, which name would come before the hyphen and which name

would come after the hyphen. As this respondent explains, his father-in-law was particularly concerned that his son's name was going to be placed after the hyphen: "He thought this was emasculating to his son...to have his son have his name come in what he considered a subsidiary, secondary sort of position." In this situation, having one's name come *after* the hyphen is perhaps perceived by the respondent's father-in-law as even more feminizing than being gay, which itself has tended to already be culturally stereotyped in this way (Connell 1995). In this sense, the order of names is not only likened to the cognitive worth of one's name, but such concerns are also boundary-patrolling, speaking to one's worth *as a man* and whether "one properly does 'masculine'" (Gamson 1997:187).

*Disorganizing Descent: Ancestral History, Men's Legacy, and Biological Legitimacy*

Concerns over the positionality or sequence of hyphenated names may also be connected to anxieties about what hyphenated names might mean for distinguishing the boundaries of family history and the story lines of ancestry and descent. The fact that one name is placed after the hyphen, into a potentially subsidiary position, may mean that it becomes lost from genealogical narratives. In addition, the hyphenated name itself, rather than helping to organize these so-called lines of descent, tends to be perceived as *disorganizing* descent. In other words, given that descent is traditionally told through "strictly unilineal" forms, hyphenating, a form of ambilineal descent, may be perceived as making "genealogical paths" ambiguous. As Zerubavel (2003) points out, genealogies are often of particular concern because they help organize identity. In other words, "who we are is still also affected by those we descend from," and thus, we have a vested



interest in our roots (Zerubavel 2003:62-63), which are often seen as being revealed through shared surnames. Without a common surname then, which has most often been conflated with a *single* surname, these roots and their perceived continuity “through families across generations” might be untraceable (Zerubavel 2003:57).

Hyphenated names, which tend to highlight double ties, if not double descent, confound the “genealogical path through which we transmit social rights and duties” (Zerubavel 2003:68). Despite the fact that drawing on both male and female ancestors might actually promote greater ancestral “breadth” and by extension greater ancestral “depth” (Zerubavel 2003:65; Zerubavel 2012:34), ambilineal name forms, like hyphenation, are perceived as roadblocks to the past, severely undermining any continuous sense of family identity and history. Such ambiguity of ties and pedigree is, as Zerubavel explains highly discomfoting, like being ““cast out upon [a] sea of kinless oblivion”” (2003:63). Not only is hyphenating in the United States still not a common practice, it has also not quite been worked out intergenerationally. In other words, the “intergenerational transitivity” of hyphenated names (Zerubavel 2003:57), how they are transmitted across generations, continues to remain unresolved. In fact, attempts to resolve this have typically taken shape in a return to unilineal forms. Such single lines of descent, which “obliterate virtually half of our ancestors from our memory,” are often emphasized to “ensure the continuity of structure in the least ambiguous (and thus least contentious) way” (Zerubavel 2003:68).

Even name hyphenators who embrace a both/and genealogical vision and who see hyphenation as facilitating biographical continuity, find such ambiguity discomfoting. In fact, as much as name hyphenators reject either/or forms of descent, which single

surname forms tend to promote, they also revert to more essentialist narratives when it comes to ancestral identity. One respondent spoke about this in terms of her strong aversion to the possibility of her husband also hyphenating:

There's something about the ability to go back and I don't know what I think or what I imagine to happen...why there would be confusion...but something inside wants future generations to be able to trace back and when both hyphenate, but it's like, you lose that...by mushing it all together. I'd like [future children] to be able to trace back and say, "this is who I am and this is where I come from."

Because hyphenating already has the potential to confound intergenerational continuity, it becomes particularly important to this respondent to prevent genealogical "mushing," which she sees as resulting "when both hyphenate." In other words, despite the fact that her husband's hyphenation may have more thoroughly preserved her own birth family name and legacy, it becomes understood instead as the tipping point for genealogical uncertainty. Not only does she sense that there are limits on the extent to which hyphenated names might reasonably allow one to trace their family heritage, but she also suggests that her husband has more "genealogical worthiness" than she does (Zerubavel 2003:62). In this way, she perhaps very accurately reflects the cultural tendency to privilege men's roles in preserving "pure genealogies" (Zerubavel 2003:62).

Such a privileging of men's legacies and a notion of pure genealogy is not only made relevant for ancestral identity, but also becomes important for "fathers' progenitorial legitimacy" (Zerubavel 2003:68). According to Zerubavel, the acute concern for paternity can be seen in the "institutionalization of marriage as well as the strict social taboos on female sexual promiscuity," which are both designed to reduce the biological ambiguity of offspring (2003:68). And as Zerubavel continues, concerns for paternity are further revealed by the fact that "almost half of all societies go to the...

extreme of officially promoting absolute female-line *genealogical amnesia*" (2003:68; emphasis in original). In other words, being able to tie ancestry to male lines is contingent not only on a patrilineal system of descent, through which paternity can be socially seen, but also the concurrent elimination of female lines of descent.

Given that most hyphenated names include these female lines, they resist "naturalistic assumptions" (Almack 2005:247) about the entitlement of men to have children named after them, as well as presumptions that the father's name inherently confers legitimacy (Foss and Edson 1989). Although some married female respondents pointed out that their birth name was actually the name of their father and so was arguably still part of a patrilineal descent system, most female respondents understood this name as "theirs" as women and thus, saw hyphenation as introducing a female-line descent narrative into their married identities. In this regard they not only claimed ownership over this name, but also seemed to suggest that the "fact" of their own femaleness acted to reset the name in matrilineal terms. Likewise, respondents whose hyphenated names included both their mother's and father's surnames understood hyphenation as a unique way of incorporating ancestral ties from their mother's family. When it comes to these names in particular, because the male name tends to come *after* the hyphen, there is a fear not only that the male name becomes relegated to a subsidiary position, conflated with subordinate, but also that men's legacies might be made invisible. As one respondent noted, his decision to hyphenate using his mother's name was particularly upsetting to his father: "He was hurt because he saw it not as adding [my mother's] name to honor her, but as taking away from his name."

In addition, given that these names may often include the mother's name, which has traditionally been used to denote illegitimacy, thus labeling women's disregard for "community sexual mores" (Augustine-Adams 1997:2), the hyphenation of children's names also risks implying biological ambiguity. This is of particular concern to marital hyphenators, who despite their own hyphenation, tended to be averse to hyphenating their children's names. One respondent, who was right in the middle of researching her family "tree," pointed out the biological confusion that might result if her children's names were hyphenated. She explains:

When we have children, the children will have my husband's name. It will not be hyphenated, because then he wouldn't be very happy. One of my pet projects right now has been to research the genealogy of my family...and what has been very interesting for me is to see that if someone was born out of wedlock, they don't have the same last name [as the father], so as I'm sitting here writing it...a hundred years from now, if someone is reading this, they wouldn't understand why [my children] don't have the same last name...who the biological father was...I don't want that. When my children are looking at their [family tree], it will say my husband's name and [they will know] this is who you came from and this is your lineage and I want them to have that and be very clear about that.

As this respondent suggests, being "clear" about family lineage is not simply about family membership, it is also about the clarity of paternity and as another respondent put it, the cultural need for children to be "recognized" by a father regardless of his social presence or support. Although name hyphenators tended to express this as an anxiety over how questions of paternity might reflect on their *children*, it is likely that this was also a concern for how children's names might reflect on *them* as parents and partners, particularly around moral and sexual norms.

### **A Family (Name) Cleansed of Its Ambiguities**

Surname hyphenators are seen as *undecided* about their commitments, *androgynous* in their gender roles, and potentially *untraceable* in their roots. Such understandings are fundamentally related to uncertainty and unclassifiability and the anxieties that intermediate and ambiguous positions provoke. As ambivalent identities, hyphenated names disrupt stability and clarity and thus, severely disturb a sense of social order. In this way, hyphenated names and even the hyphen itself ultimately become perceived as a threat to marriage and family, precisely because they make gender roles and the expectations associated with those roles, including social and biological legacies, appear indeterminate. Reaffirming gender distinctions and stabilizing marital roles then, is seen as contingent on regulating not just hyphenators, but also hyphens themselves. Most often, this regulating takes shape through hyphen-hating discourses, in this case constructed as a defense of marriage and family. Similar to that of Hyphenated Americanism, in which the phenomenon of hyphen-hating also emerges, the playing up of the ambiguity of hyphenated names and their “dangerous” consequences can be a way to reaffirm clear, essential, and stable notions of family and identity (Douglas 1966).

Although the anxiety provoked by such ambiguity has not always resulted in an overt resistance to women’s hyphenation, it has evoked a significant level of resistance regarding the hyphenation of children’s names, to the extent that naming decisions for children are patrolled much more closely. Many respondents noted the relief that family members felt when they learned that the names of future children would not be hyphenated. And on the other hand, when children’s names *were* hyphenated, my respondents noted that family members often expressed deep concerns. As Kathryn Almack notes, “the rhetoric of children’s needs” acts as a compelling tool to support

notions of traditional family and to enforce normative social practices (2005:245). In the case of hyphenated surnames, this rhetoric foregrounds the hyphen's potentially detrimental effect on children (and future children) and becomes a powerful "emotive force" (Woodhead 1997:66) against hyphenation. Such "ill effects" often become manifested as the likely intergenerational confusion that hyphenation may cause as well as concerns over the biological ambiguity of children. Ultimately, invoking the "best interests" of children becomes a persuasive strategy to control the generational "spread" of name hyphenation.

Anxieties surrounding the hyphenation of children's names have often focused on the complications hyphenation may cause. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, even parents who have hyphenated their own names are hesitant to hyphenate their children's names, citing anxieties related to progenitorial legitimacy and the traceability of lines of descent. As I noted in the previous section, the fact that hyphenated names include the mother's surname, something that has historically denoted illegitimacy, raises a concern over how the child (and parents) might be perceived. Respondents' own narratives reflect this anxiety and suggest that they fear the potential hyphen-hating reactions that may result from hyphenating children's names. Despite the fact that a hyphenated name may more accurately reflect the nuances of family relationships and lineage, the stigma associated with illegitimacy and the moral discourse relating to the biological ambiguity of children becomes a persuasive means of "containing" hyphenation.

In addition, there is a significant concern over the name that hyphenated children will take when they marry, particularly if they marry another hyphenated adult, and whether, as a result, the surnames of future generations will include multiple hyphens.

Implicitly, the attention to “multiple” hyphens also highlights an anxiety surrounding “multiplying hyphens,” or a kind of “(inter)generational compounding” that might result from people with hyphenated or even double hyphenated names having hyphenated offspring of their own. Germany, as an extreme example, cited the chaotic potential of “hyphenation multiplication,” taking a restrictive stand against hyphens by making it illegal to give hyphenated names to children (Jacoby 2005). German laws also regulate already-hyphenated names by limiting them to a single hyphen, arguing that the “identifying purpose” of names would be rendered ineffective by name “ballooning” (Kulish 2009). Family belonging and even individual identity might become increasingly unclear and children might face ridicule and confusion if their names were left to “balloon out of control” (Jacoby 2005). It may also be the case that concerns over “hyphenation multiplication” are simply restating (yet masking) naturalistic assumptions about the right of men to have children named after them. In cultures in which passing on one’s name has been a significant symbol of both masculinity and power, hyphenation doesn’t just create multiple hyphens, it demasculinizes. After all, “the name *is* the man” (Miller 1927:600, emphasis in original). Reactions toward multiple hyphens are perhaps also about protecting men’s legacy and the status that this legacy typically confers (Jacoby 2005). It is, after all, most often the woman’s name that becomes invisible when hyphenation is rejected as a name form.

Framed around a responsibility to protect children, these concerns highlight an anxiety over the perceived limitless potential of the hyphen and a fear that not just names, but also the boundaries of family belonging and even gender roles, might become increasingly ambiguous. Eliminating hyphenation then, acts as a way to reaffirm these

boundaries. Whether through laws, as in the example of Germany, or through stigmatizing reactions, multiplying hyphens and what they might mean for the “order of things” are brought back under control. Accusations of questionable commitment, moral indictments of biological or even genealogical legitimacy, and the feminizing of men all effectively set limits on exactly how far name hyphenators will go (i.e. with children). Like hyphen-hating crusades within Hyphenated Americanism, casting the hyphen as stigma in this way is an attempt to confront ambivalence and force it back into an “either/or manifesto” (Bauman 1991). Disambiguating gender distinctions and stabilizing family and marital roles then, takes shape as not just constraining hyphenators, but also as constraining multiplying hyphens.

### **A Double Discourse: Flexible Orientations Toward Individual and Community**

For surname hyphenators, hyphenation becomes a way to recognize and “do” the complexities and ambivalences of identity, family, and even marriage, much like the concept of “riding the hyphen” developed by Spivak (1993). Despite the different ways and different reasons in which my respondents came to have hyphenated names, their similarity rests in their both/and identity conceptualizations. Whether they come to hyphenation as a way to reject, yet also defer to tradition; as way to keep, yet also change their names; in order to recognize both self and relationships; or to acknowledge both their mother’s family name and father’s family name, surname hyphenators can have it both ways. The hyphenated name comes to represent a narrative bridge and contact zone for family, heritage, ethnicity, couple-ness, career, individuality, relationships, and in the case of some name hyphenators even a contact zone specifically for their maternal and



paternal relationships. In an attempt to fashion a continuous self, name hyphenators ride the hyphen of their social biographies.

Yet surname hyphenators are also always on an ambivalent threshold of these identity locations, never quite synthesized. As much as they may use the hyphen to disrupt conventional renderings of identity, they also make competing claims toward the certainty and fixity of identity. On one hand, the hyphen represents a refusal to compartmentalize identities and a way to loosen identity absolutes, more in line with the politics of ambiguity. On the other hand, it is a move toward identity building, a way to make the “truth” of their relationships visible and thus also in line with the politics of identity. Because hyphenation can never truly resolve these conflicting feelings (which may be precisely the point), it is perhaps best understood not just as a biographical bridge, but as a “bridging concept” for ambivalences (Connidis and McMullin 2002:559), an opportunity to name oneself beyond the limits of either/or understandings, yet also the ability to recast one’s sense of self in a coherent and unified way. In other words, even as much as name hyphenators unfix identity, they are also inevitably fixing identities to the hyphen.

This requires the recognition that the way in which name hyphenators “do” ambivalence may not be a way of “working out” identity toward an unambivalent identity. Instead, these ambivalent and multivocal negotiations (Baxter 2010) in which respondents engaged highlights the tension between different and sometimes competing discourses. This includes discourses related to the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity, but also a related discursive struggle of individualism and community (Baxter 2010). In Leslie Baxter’s terms, a discourse of individualism “emphasizes freedom from

societal traditions and obligations,” while a discourse of community emphasizes “social obligation – expectations, duties, and accountabilities to others” (2010:373). Marriage for instance, would be conceived within individualism as driven by choice and self-interests, rather than obligation; whereas, within community discourse, marriage is imbued with “traditional values” and “duty” designed to preserve an “existing moral and social order” (Baxter 2010:373). As Baxter points out, within marital relationships, women who take their spouse’s surname tend to value the community-oriented “couple identity” more than self identity, while “women who elect to keep their own surname appear to be concerned about their autonomous identity independent of the spouse” (2010:376). Interestingly, as Baxter continues, “that autonomous identity from the husband is verbally constructed by drawing on a discourse of community in which they keep their maiden names as a way to honor their own family heritage” (2010:376). Name hyphenators draw on a discourse of individualism in their concerns for an autonomous and visible self, which often includes professional achievements. At the same time, they attend to a discourse of community in their concerns for family bonds, including their relational roles, ethnic connections, and heritage, even those beyond the closed circle of the nuclear family unit. This applies as much to marital hyphenators as it does to those who hyphenate with their parents’ names. As one respondent explains, her hyphenation, which included both her mother’s and father’s names, is both an emphasis of her true self, “a way to emphasize me,” as well as a reflection of her shared connections, being “raised by both” maternal and paternal families. Hyphenation becomes a way to navigate these competing orientations and to reframe their either/or potential into an articulation of a double and flexible discourse: both self-oriented and other-oriented (Baxter 2010).

Surnames, of course, can act as political communications and as Augustine-Adams puts it, even “linguistic correlates of social structure” (1997:2). They set boundaries, distinguish who we are, and determine the scope of our memberships, obligations, and rights. For name hyphenators, this question of “who” and the parameters of belonging are not so easily answered and certainly become implicated in this tension between individual and community. Although those with hyphenated names may see hyphenation as expanding how they can conceptualize “who they are,” their ambivalent commitments, as manifested in the double naming of hyphenation, come to be seen as confounding the cultural ideal of the unambiguous family and even normative prescriptions for gender (Sarkisian 2006). In addition, the ambivalence that hyphenation marks not only disorganizes rigidly defined categorical concepts like keeper/changer, masculine/feminine, paternal/maternal, and even addition/subtraction, but also the related master oppositions of purity/impurity, good/bad, authenticity/inauthenticity, and legitimacy/illegitimacy. Within surname hyphenation the disruption of these oppositions becomes manifested in concerns over family connections and the perceived legitimacy of relationships (both biological and social); in the organization and clarity of descent systems and family legacies; and in the gendering of roles, responsibilities, and commitments within the family. The typically neat and solid boundaries between belonging and not belonging, good wife and bad wife, marital family and birth family, legitimate child and illegitimate child, or masculine and feminine, are ultimately made uncertain. And being able to sort out these categories – or not being able to – has significant consequences for whether one interprets the social world as stable, secure, and ordered or unstable, dangerous, and disordered.

Despite the fact that naming, as well as how we organize kinship and descent, and even gender, is always already social, hyphenation is often seen as disrupting otherwise natural classifications and thus, the double discourse of hyphenation becomes translated as dangerous – what will hyphenated names mean for our future? In this sense, hyphen-haters tend to have a community bias, emphasizing how family and relationships should and should not be carved (Zerubavel 1991), and thus the need for hyphenation to be regulated, sanctioned, and constrained in order for social (and specifically family) stability to be preserved. For name hyphenators, however, hyphenation is located at the interstices of discourses of community and individualism. It is a way to do ambivalence, to construct one's identity and family circumstances as both/and, and to move beyond the limits of both overly rigid and overly ambiguous narratives of self. Thus, hyphenators are on the threshold of multiple self-understandings. Although they often use hyphenation as a move toward unity, which they perceive as culturally valuable, they do so in a way that rejects the conflation of unity with singularity. Hyphenators express mixed feelings and conflicted attitudes, not necessarily with the people in their lives, as hyphen-haters often suggest, but with social and cultural expectations that require either/or renderings of marriage and family roles. They want to be able to express the desire to be a good wife and mother, for example, yet simultaneously reject some of the ways in which these have been traditionally defined vis-à-vis naming. And they see the hyphen as facilitating these goals. In this sense, name hyphenating becomes a way to work out competing and contradictory interests and desires; to navigate community-oriented goals with self-oriented goals; and to reframe these orientations in a way that does not require them to privilege one or the other.

## Chapter 5

### Structuring and Confounding: Toward the Cultural Politics of Hyphenation

In this concluding chapter, I return to the themes that cut across both contexts, including the contrast between rigid and more flexible perspectives, the anxiety of ambiguity and notions of the hyphen as threat, and the way in which cultural schemas that favor unity collide with the perceived duality and ambivalence of hyphenation. I then foreground this duality, including two moments in which hyphenation is used to move ambivalently in and between rigidity and flexibility. These moments include a refocused attention to narrative patterns in both contexts, namely the way in which hyphenation is cast as a minus sign as well as negotiations of hyphenation within community orientations like kinship and family. Exploring these patterns further speaks to the ambivalence and ambiguity of hyphenation, but also suggests that even this ambiguity itself cannot be read in one-dimensional and univocal terms. In other words, it is not as simple as to say that hyphenation *erases* identity boundaries, as some have. Instead, hyphenation provides *complication* for rigid and binary conceptualizations of identity. And it is this complication and the ambiguity that attends it that has led the hyphenated identity to sometimes be perceived as liberating and at other times perceived as threatening. Next, I consider how the nuances of ambiguity and ambivalence vis-à-vis hyphenation might require additional analysis, particularly within naming research, in which discussions of hyphenation may need to be reframed. Finally, I end the discussion

by suggesting that the hyphen might be a useful mark for understanding struggles and disputes over classification, including the way in which it hyphenation can become a marker for competing discourses, cognitive schemas, and categorical divisions. Attention to these additional cultural performances of hyphenation offers insight to how they hyphen might represent what Garber calls “a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture” (1992:17).

### **Hyphens, Daggers, and Red Flags**

Hyphenation acts as a mechanism for representing and even “doing” ambivalence, and from the perspective of those who are committed to a rigid style of organizing the world this has often meant that the hyphenated label comes to be seen as ambiguous. This is particularly true within social contexts that rely heavily on fixed, essentialized, and mutually exclusive classifications, especially those that tend to be politically salient and in which the boundaries between classifications are highly patrolled. Within the contexts of national identity and family identity, it has often been the case that hyphenation is a discursive marker for struggles over classification and the nature of identity – moments in which visions of identity as rigid, either/or, and essentialized act in tension with visions of identity as flexible, both/and, and ambiguous. And it is in these moments that the conventional boundaries of identities may become vulnerable and may be reevaluated or even displaced.

Because the hyphenated identity is located at the juncture betwixt and between categories, in a way that “destabilizes comfortable binarity” (Garber 1992:16) and communicates multivocality and ambivalence, it has often provoked significant anxiety

for those who are committed to rigid schemas. On one level this anxiety stems from the ambivalent nature of the hyphen itself, and the way that it appears to transcend classificatory limits. But on another level, it also becomes a “repository of [our] deepest fears and anxieties” (Gatzouras 2002:186). Rather than address that the borderlines between national identities and family identities might already be socially based, and thus mutable and always already potentially ambiguous, hyphenatedness becomes discourses as a symptom of dis-ordered individuals rather than symptomatic of the social basis of identity classifications (Garber 1992:367). The hyphen-hating rhetoric that emerges displaces anxieties over boundary crossings and ambiguity onto the mark itself and the moral character of hyphenates. In other words, to assuage a generalized anxiety that the world is elusive, fluid, or in Bauman’s (2000) terms “liquid,” hyphenation becomes located at the site of crisis as something unnatural, polluted, and disordered.

In fact, the anxiety that hyphenation has provoked has been so extreme that it has been dramatized as “threat to nation” in discourses related to American national identity and “threat to family” in discourses related to family and marital identity. The dagger imagery that President Wilson used to describe the hyphen, for example, captures the way in which anxieties become focused on the mark itself, seen as threatening the integrity of the national “body” – that is, “the vitals of the Republic” (New York Times 1915). Likewise, discourses that see the hyphen within surnames as a red flag mark the extent to which it is also understood as a threat to integrity, in this case, the integrity of the family. This anxiety of ambiguity, as manifested in notions of threat, is really an effort toward stabilizing binarity and/or containing the ambiguous, often through practices of exclusion and containment (Levine 1985; Zerubavel 1991). These practices

are intended to clarify and reaffirm categorical distinctions, to “force mental ‘monsters’ into one of the conventional categories available” and ultimately to return order to the chaos (Zerubavel 1991:35).

Of course, these cultural approaches to the hyphen, as a threat and needing to be expunged, are not far removed from the grammatical impulse to control the aesthetic and functional chaos of the hyphen. And some scholars have even argued that anxiety over the hyphen has resulted not only in a rejection of ambiguity, but also in a cultural tendency for the hyphen itself to disappear. Hyphens are daggers and red flags both at the level of grammar and at the level of identity politics and such designations are “highly indicative of threatened ideological positions” (Epstein and Straub 1991:3). The (sometimes imposed) labeling of specific identities as hyphenated and subsequent attempts toward the containment or erasure of the complicated and complicating hyphenated figure reveals patterns in the cultural value system as well as “deep sentiments toward the social order in general” (Zerubavel 1991:70).

I return here to the idea that these discourses, whether in terms of grammar or in terms of identity, reveal American cultural values related to singularity, unity, and even purity. Such cultural values not only privilege binary schemas of identity, but also try to continuously read identity as integrated, unambiguous, and stable. Moreover, such values are characteristic of a cultural mindset and agenda of classification that privileges rigid either/or categorizations and that requires assimilative and community orientations. Those who do not fit must be closely watched, and ultimately, like the grammatical Mr. Hyphen, must be put in their place. This similarity of grammatical and cultural sentiments seems to reinforce that the hyphen has been a cognitively complex, even



distressing phenomenon, and this is precisely because it has been perceived as ambiguous and thus resistant to normative classification systems. In this sense, cultural politics are “mapped” (Epstein and Straub 1991:2) onto the hyphen with the purpose of reaffirming boundaries and containing transgression. Ultimately, if hyphens are unable to be “exacted,” they must be “excised” (Furth 1994:305).

Of course, readings of hyphenation as unexactable are not inevitable and this speaks to the linguistic flexibility of hyphenation as well as the cognitive flexibility of the social actors who read the hyphen, particularly those who understand themselves as hyphenated. In the sections that follow, I highlight two moments in which this flexibility tends to be prevalent, namely, the ways in which the hyphen becomes cast (differently) as a minus sign for both Hyphenated Americans and surname hyphenators as well understandings of hyphenation as both interrupting and facilitating essentialized notions of kinship and family. In both of these cases, hyphenators and hyphen-haters both seem to express the value of solidarity and unity. Yet they approach solidarity and unity differently, particularly in the ways they operationalize the hyphen. These common instances, yet differing approaches, foreground the way in which hyphenation reveals both the politics of identity and the politics of ambiguity, as a move toward assimilation and community as well as an alternative articulation of resistance and individualism. In this way, as much as hyphenation has been seen as disrupting essentialized and naturalized understandings of identity, it has also been used to affirm such understandings and therefore may represent a kind of “flexible-rigidity” (De Bono 1969). Moreover, attention to such dual uses of hyphenation and the differing negotiations that

accompany it also highlight the specific way in which hyphenation can be used to “do” ambivalence and well as the social nature of identity more generally.

### **Flexible-Rigidity: Negotiating Commitment, Cohesion, and Self**

In cultural schemas in which unity is a pressing concern, whether the “closing up” of words or identity boundaries, anything that implies duality or ambivalence, as the both/and quality of hyphenation has, can be discomforting. After all, inasmuch as it implies dis-unification, duality is the antithesis to unity. In the case of both Hyphenated Americans and surname hyphenators, “double” discourses are prevalent. In part this stems from the structural doubleness of the hyphenated form, which becomes conceptually understood as denoting a “duality of intention” and often moral duplicity. As Anthony Giddens points out, conditions of modernity can create unique dilemmas of meaning, particularly the modern tendency toward fragmentation, which ultimately has “to be resolved in order to preserve a coherent narrative of self-identity” (Giddens 1991:416). This not only means in Giddens terms, the “avoidance of dissonance” (1991:188), but also the ability to rely on “formed frameworks” (1991:39) that provide structure and order, effectively bracketing out instability by affirming a coherent sense of the world. Within American culture in particular, these formed frameworks have tended to privilege either/or schemas as well as unification and integration (Levine 1985; Brody 2008). In this sense, the doubleness and both/and framework of hyphenation can create a discursive dilemma for cultural scripts and frameworks that emphasize rigid views of identity as unitary and coherent (Baxter 2010).

This is particularly apparent in images cast onto or even invoked by Hyphenated Americans and surname hyphenators. For example, the hermaphroditic portrayal of Hyphenated Americans in the political cartoon in Chapter 3 is not unlike perceptions of surname hyphenators as androgynous. Likewise, understandings of one's hyphenated name as signaling a "split" or one's "dual roots" are similar to claims that Hyphenated Americanism represents "two dimensions" of cultural identity (Lahiri 2006) or double cultural origins. Of course, the point is not so much that hyphenation comes to signal two-ness, but rather the way in which its two-ness becomes implicated in assessments about one's commitments, loyalties, obligations, and even moral character. Because the boundaries surrounding identities tell us something about inclusion and exclusion, they tend to answer questions of who or even what we are, and by extension also help make clear "whose side we are on" (Gilbert 2005). From the perspective of those who see the world rigidly, the dual both/and nature of the hyphen not only makes these divisions less clear, but also one's moral orientation to a particular side. As a result, both Hyphenated Americans and surname hyphenators tend to be seen as undecided and indecisive and this leads their commitments and solidarities, whether at the national level or at the level of the family, to be perceived as questionable, even unreliable.

*Social Arithmetic: Adding and Subtracting the Hyphen*

Interestingly, in both cases such ambiguities, in which hyphenation muddies the divides between insider/outsider, good/bad, friend/enemy, and legitimate/illegitimate, become filtered through a subtractive logic, even to the extent that the hyphen itself becomes "mathematized" (Zerubavel 2012:58). In both contexts for example, the hyphen

becomes cast as a minus sign, which is only possible, of course, because of its duality (and of course, its linearity, on which the dagger imagery also relies). Whereas Hyphenated Americans were historically encouraged to treat the hyphen as a minus sign, within surnames, hyphen-haters have feared that it might turn into one. Despite this difference, both cases signal not only that the hyphen is often read as morally negative, but also that its presence is sometimes understood as “taking away” from one’s level of commitment. In addition, for both Hyphenated Americans and surname hyphenators, this notion of subtraction illustrates pressures to remove the hyphen and its dual system of classification, ultimately toward reconstructing it as either/or. At the same time, this logic of subtraction becomes contrasted with an additive logic, particularly from the perspective of hyphenators who may see hyphenation as actually expanding the breadth of their commitments and obligations, including their self-commitments, as well as the number of connections, whether cultural or familial, they can claim. Understanding hyphenation in this way is what leads some surname hyphenators and even some Hyphenated Americans to deliberately enact the hyphen and this is likely a reflection of hyphenators’ general tendency toward more flexible orientations and greater comfort with both/and arrangements. This is particularly pronounced in the view of one surname respondent, who sees hyphenation as both “adding” her partner’s name, but also as providing a potential window for “subtracting” it in the event they divorce. In other words, she sees it as flexibly functioning to *both* add *and* subtract.

On one hand, as evidenced by notions of subtraction, the doubleness of hyphenation can confound understandings of political and family commitments and ties. Thus, for hyphen-haters, subtracting the hyphen would mean a move toward cohesion

and unity. On the other hand, as evidenced by hyphenators, hyphenation can be used to extend the range of these ties, piecing together one's individual concerns about identity with one's social situatedness. In this sense, hyphenators value cohesion as well, but not cohesion in the sense of singularity, and they see adding the hyphen as a way to accomplish this, particularly as a way to accomplish a sense of biographical coherence, in which the competing interests of various identities, cultures, roles, and duties – from couple to careers, from children to birth families, from culture to nation – can be recognized. The fact that hyphenation can represent all of these things and can be a mechanism to both add and subtract speaks to its multivocality (and ambiguity) and this is precisely why, for example, surname hyphenators take up hyphenation as a self-conscious act of “doing” ambivalence. Of course, multivocality does not necessarily mean parity or in temporal terms, simultaneity, and it is often the case that these identifications make conflicting demands that hyphenators must sort out, which some scholars have likened to a constantly moving seesaw (Pérez Firmat 1994; Gatzouras 2002:185); that is, an oscillation between more than one cognitive or role orientation. Most often these demands take shape in struggles between assimilation and resistance or between community and individualism. Both sets of mathematical logics, for example, in which both hyphen-haters and hyphenators participate, can be understood as facilitating group-centered agendas that privilege universalism, integration, and essentialized visions of citizenship and family. At the same time, however, hyphenators also express a more flexible cognitive approach than hyphen-haters: hyphenators also see hyphenation as a way to express resistance to “normative integration” (Brody 2008:104), as a way to preserve their own self-interests, whether cultural, familial, or professional, yet also as a

way to reject a solely individualist orientation. In this sense, debates over hyphenation, in this case its additive or subtractive potential, highlight differing values placed on the group and the individual as well as differing cognitive approaches to hyphenation.

### *Fictive Kin and Social Families*

In a similar vein, understandings of hyphenation related to kinship across both contexts also reveals tensions between group and individual as well as similar tensions between assimilation/resistance and community/individualism. But more so than the additive and subtractive logic applied to hyphenation, notions of kinship and family often act as naturalizing concepts, emphasizing an essentialist politic in which identities are seen as real, unchanging, and rooted in the natural. Although kinship takes a literal shape in surname debates, it also becomes prevalent within national identity in which “essentialized visions of peoplehood” (Zerubavel 2012:57) are reinforced by a kind of “fictive kinship” (Zerubavel 2012:47). In the case of surname hyphenators for instance, familial and genealogical ties are certainly viewed as having natural, if not biological, foundations, a view held by both hyphenators and hyphen-haters. Hyphen-haters see the hyphen as creating biological and genealogical ambiguity, in the sense that it makes progenitorial legitimacy and the traceability of lines of descent unreadable. In fact, claims to “blood ties” (Zerubavel 2012:55) are so powerful that even surname hyphenators themselves sometimes express similar concerns, particularly that hyphenation might result in their family legitimacy being questioned. Yet surname hyphenators, who may at times use the hyphen as a normalcy-seeking behavior, also see the hyphen as actually facilitating a natural reality, which is particularly apparent in claims that the hyphen

facilitates a more accurate display of one's multiple "roots" or as one hyphenated respondent put it, "what's in my blood." This was true even for one adopted respondent, who expressed a naturalized understanding of her hyphenated name as carrying the stories of her descent and ancestry, despite the fact that it was not her biological history. Similarly, in the case of national identity, "myths of origin and descent" come to shape an imagined view of national communities as "extended families," particularly through claims to "patriotism" or in metaphors like "Sons" or "Daughters" of the Revolution, "Founding Fathers" (Zerubavel 2012:47), and "Pilgrim Fathers" (Ricento 2003:621). Furthermore, this familial imagery, despite its fictive basis, is even taken up in the very personification of Americanness, against which the Hyphenated American's assimilable potential comes to be measured: Uncle Sam.

The point here, as Zerubavel suggests, is that "projecting familial imagery" helps to essentialize and thus reify visions of identities as "bound together" (2012:56), like those so often held in assimilative and community discourses. In other words, familial claims can effectively naturalize notions of unity and solidarity. And this often hides the way in which these communities are actually products of a cultural imaginings rather than some natural logic. Notions of kinship for instance, often rely on claims to common origins, common surnames, common ancestors or forefathers, and even common thoughts and practices (Ricento 2003). Whether in the context of actual family or the symbolic family of nation-states, hyphenation is often seen as a threat precisely because it can confound essentialized visions of unified identities and a common "family interest" (Pillemer and Lüscher 2004:9). In the context of who counts as American, which has ultimately been the task of determining the essence of Americanism, primordial claims to kinship often

mask the reality that citizenship is really a social designation. After all, even when Hyphenated Americans are naturalized or even natural-born, their cultural citizenship often remains in question. And in a more extreme sense, this is not unlike the logic used with the one-drop rule, in which even biological realities – having a white parent and a black parent, for example – are outweighed by the social asymmetry between whiteness and blackness in America (Zerubavel 2012:62). (Of course, this social asymmetry becomes recoded in biological terms).

In this sense, debates over hyphenation actually expose the extent to which identities, even those with biological foundations or based in naturalistic assumptions like those in kinship, are socially determined rather than derived from some natural reality. In fact, surname hyphenators may actually turn this natural logic on its head, particularly in the way that they use hyphenation as a social logic to reinforce biological relatedness. In other words, despite the genetic reality of their connections to children, birth families, and even ancestors, they recognize that being socially classified as related, whether others can “see” the connection, is often more important. In addition, their own resistance to hyphenating children’s names also seems to highlight cultural rather than biological concerns. The view that hyphenating children’s names might create biological ambiguity around paternity or that it might take away from the clarity of the paternal relationship seems to suggest a “pronouncedly asymmetrical manner of ‘mental weighing’” (Zerubavel 2012:61), in which the father “counts more” in determining identity. Despite the fact that hyphenating a child’s name would promote greater overall clarity to family connections on both sides of the hyphen, it is clear that not all biological ties carry the same weight and this asymmetry signals the extent to which these ties are culturally,



rather than biologically based. Even when family membership is “seemingly unambiguously determined” by biological realities, it is nevertheless social convention that determines how they should be socially seen (Zerubavel 2012:72).

Whether family identity or national identity, both are ultimately products of classification. Although on one hand hyphenation is seen as disrupting naturalized notions of identity, both in terms of the symbolic kinship bestowed by Americanism or in terms of the biological kinship bestowed by surnames, it can also be a tool to assert essentialized claims to relationships, ancestors, family origins and histories, and ancestral lands and cultures. Moreover, surname hyphenators’ flexible understanding of hyphenation, as able to affirm biological connections, yet as also able to make them potentially ambiguous, seems a powerful awareness that even biologically-based identities are not pre-discursive. In fact, even those who make claims to a Hyphenated American identity understand its discursive power, as a label that reflects or even produces a kind of “cultural straddling” that on one hand allows them to move toward being closer to their “roots” or “origins,” and on the other hand, also makes them feel culturally ambivalent and disoriented (Villavicencio 2005:212). In both cases, hyphenation is seen as a powerful tool for rendering identity and hyphenators seem to use it to move ambivalently between both natural and social logics in their identity claims.

### *Flexible-Rigidity*

Such sentiments surrounding hyphenation, including additive and subtractive logics, naturalized claims to kinship and family, negotiations of cohesion and unity, and particularly the way in which hyphenators can use it to “do” ambivalence, captures the

central issue of the cultural politics of hyphenation – that it can signal both a redrawing and reaffirming of the boundaries of particular identity classifications. Those who enact the hyphen move in and out of rigid and more flexible understandings of identity and this signals their overall mental flexibility when it comes to these self-classifications. For example, on one hand hyphenators use hyphenation to expand the limits of existing identity schemas, disrupting conventional understandings of those limits. At the same time, however, hyphenators are also clearly drawing upon hyphenation toward the goal of identity building. At times they even use the rhetoric of ambiguity to paradoxically reassert a sense of naturalness of identities and an essentialized vision of unity, particularly in the case of surname hyphenators and their relationships to children and partners. Their understandings of unity, however, are not at the expense of their own personal, often competing, goals and interests; rather, hyphenation is often used to accommodate both. This suggests that hyphenators engage in a reframing of cohesion and unity that does not conflate them with singularity.

Interestingly, surname hyphenators seem most likely to apply a flexible understanding to hyphenation when they use it for themselves. Although they clearly use it to make family-oriented claims, these claims are typically related to their own self-categorizations. They appear less flexible when it comes to seeing hyphenation as a family-oriented logic in which children and partners might also be expected to hyphenate. This seems to indicate that there is a limit to their flexibility. Their identities vis-à-vis children, for example, seem to be defined more rigidly. In this regard, hyphenators seem to want to emphasize a sense of their “true” self just as much as they want to resist what it means to be “true” in normative terms. In a similar vein, hyphen-haters draw on the

disruptive effect of hyphenation and play up its ambiguity as a way to clarify and reaffirm essentialist-based schemas. In addition, the fact that the hyphen can be deployed by both hyphenators and hyphen-haters – and the fact that hyphenators can even sometimes be hyphen-haters, using the hyphen as a way to both challenge and reassert rigidity – seems to suggest that hyphenation is itself situated in a flexible discursive landscape. It can be used to open up or widen definitions of identity, but also can be used to close them, and those who enact it appear to be more comfortable with its functionally ambivalent ambiguity.

As Zerubavel points out, this is the hallmark of cognitive flexibility, itself betwixt and between complete rigidity and complete fuzziness (1991:115). Hyphenators in fact “do” ambivalence through their use of both mind-sets, “vacillating between being rigid and fuzzy” (Zerubavel 1991:121). Edward de Bono refers to this as “flexible-rigidity,” a concept itself hyphenated:

To want to get rid of [fixed rigidity] does not mean advocating a wishy-washy formlessness but forms which may be just as definite at any one moment but not so permanent; something that can assume a variety of different shapes or change from one another and back again. One would then become interested not in the static nature of things but in the range of the potential natures...flexible-rigidity...Enough rigidity to give context, meaning and security. Enough flexibility to give change, improvement, adventure and hope (1969:205).

Flexible-rigidity opens up classificatory possibilities without sacrificing classification itself. And as Anzaldúa seems to suggest, such overall flexibility, in which one has a tolerance for contradictions and ambiguities, has the creative potential to “turn ambivalence into something else” (1987:79). “Twilight zones” might be threatening to the rigid mind (Zerubavel 1991:35), but the flexible mind appropriates this ambiguity as “both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the

definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (Anzaldúa 1987:81). In other words, flexibility does not mean giving up the structure that “light” and “dark” provide, but it does mean seeing lightness and darkness in a more elastic fashion. For Anzaldúa this means breaking down not just unitary paradigms, but also eventually duality, moving toward a completely “new mythos” (1987:80).

### **Conclusion and Reflections**

Although a sociological project on hyphenated identities may seem somewhat narrow, the discourses, debates, and contestations surrounding hyphenated identities highlight more general concerns. In fact, the peculiarities of hyphenation dramatize American cultural values that privilege unity and solidity, difficulties of belonging, dilemmas of identity, as well as cultural aversions to ambivalence and ambiguity. In this way, hyphenation becomes implicated not only in the discursive production of identity, but also in the discursive production of ambivalence and ambiguity. It is with this in mind that this project calls for more attention within the social sciences to the cultural politics of hyphenation. Not only is identity hyphenation a far more complicated discursive arrangement than what has been previously theorized, but readings of the nuances of hyphenated identities might be useful for advancing more general understandings of identity, cognition, and the social and discursive relations in which they are situated.

In evaluating these specific hyphenated identities, what I hope to offer is a conception of identity not in rigid terms, but like hyphenation, as a task to be performed. I suggest that the hyphen might be a powerful mark through which to understand the ambivalences and ambiguities of identity. My intention is not to ignore the cognitive

importance of universalism, singularity, or community or of the distinctions we make to construct identities. But I do try to evaluate the rigidity with which we hold those distinctions in place, particularly the way in which we seek to regulate ambiguities in order to secure a particular cognitive and social order. Moreover, I try to move beyond binary views of identity that see hyphenated labels as inevitably oppositional and asymmetrical, and instead try to reread them from a more flexible perspective. While rigidity supports firm either/or distinctions, the flexible mind of hyphenators suggests that these distinctions might be narratively bridged, in this case hyphenated, allowing for a “continuity of experience” (Kern 2003:176), a temporal coherence that requires neither biographical unity nor singularity. Identities must be read at the intersections in a way that requires us to rework our perceptions of citizenship, nationality, ethnicity, family, and even gender. And the presence of the hyphen, as a signal for ambivalence, should make us question our very understandings of identities. It disrupts the conventional space, both literally and conceptually, making it possible to explore the possibilities of identity beyond the “integrated, cohesive, and fully solidary” (Alexander 2006:406). But this does not inevitably make the hyphen a sign of disunity. Rather, it may in fact provide a new form of unity by moving beyond it, one that recognizes the “ambiguities of life” (Levine 1985:8) and instead of reducing them to one-dimensional and univocal discourses, allows for a more multivocal style of understanding.

Of course, the fact that hyphenation still provokes cultural anxiety seems to highlight the extreme pervasiveness of a rigid bias when it comes to identity, particularly within American narratives of belonging. The fact that calls to *unhyphenated* Americanism became prevalent after the 2001 World Trade Center attacks and more

recently the prevalence of hyphenated discourses within debates over the Arizona immigration law, confirms not only the way in which hyphenation becomes negatively cast during moments of identity crisis, but also that it seems to continue to be resistant to cultural normalizing. In other words, attempts by hyphen-haters to dissolve cultural hyphenations completely have simply been unsuccessful – those who straddle the line or who exist betwixt and between and who do not fit hegemonic systems of classification, whether voluntarily or imposed, are still prevalent. (Such cultural normalizing is not unlike the attempts by grammarians to harness the ambiguity of hyphenation, which was ultimately deemed hopeless). Even despite attempts by hyphen-haters to use the cultural politics of ambiguity as a way to reinforce normativity and reaffirm the boundaries of identities, the hyphen nonetheless continues to be used to redefine and reimagine identity in more flexible ways, as a sign that both “affirms and renounces” identity categorizations (Gatzouras 2002:187) and both resembles and disassembles the politics of identity.

Ultimately, this project is about more than just American national identity or even family identity. Struggles over the hyphenation of identities reflect broader cultural struggles over the classification of social actors or even ideas that straddle the line or that are seen as boundary crossing. These struggles reveal the socio-politics that inform how and where we draw these lines in the first place. The socio-political potential of the hyphen then, is relevant even beyond the specific instances discussed here. In obstetrics, for example, ambivalences over pregnancy become recognized through the term “fetus-infant” (Isaacson 1996); within domestic violence studies, the ambivalent status of a person who experiences abuse becomes recognized through the term “victim-survivor”

(Germana 2005); and although not as commonly used today, “he-she” or “she-he” was used to represent a trans-identification (Feinberg 1996:97). Like the hyphenation of Americanism and surnames, fetus-infant, victim-survivor, and he-she highlight additional moments in which the hyphen comes to represent ambiguities of meaning as well as the ongoing negotiation of identities and labels with this ambiguity (Hanchard 1990:35). Not only do they signal the changing nature of cultural classifications and even a “crisis of language” (Feinberg 1996:97), but they also highlight the symbolic significance of the hyphen for manufacturing in-between statuses. Unlike discourses that present fetus/infant, victim/survivor and he/she as separate and mutually exclusive, the hyphenation of these terms challenges their pre-established nature (Isaacson 1996:469).

Of course, like hyphenated identities, the hyphenation of these terms is not an inevitable move toward opening up classifications. As Isaacson (1996) points out, the hyphenated fetus-infant emerged during a cultural move to restrict women’s reproductive rights. In this case, the ambiguity of hyphenation is used politically – à la the politics of identity – to render “conception” as ambiguous and emphasize a particularly constraining biological vision of pregnancy. The victim-survivor on the other hand, engages such ambiguities – à la the politics of ambiguity – as a way to try to expand the limits of either label on its own. Renderings of abused women, for example, as either victims or survivors have been problematic. A victim label risks alienating abused women who do not understand themselves as victims, while a survivor label risks public support as well as the support of advocacy and legal systems, all of which have often relied on victim profiles. In a similar vein, the hyphenated pronouns he-she, or alternatively she-he, disrupt either/or representations of “she” and “he” which tend to imply that sex and

gender are essentially the same thing. Instead, the hyphenated form, in which the first pronoun comes to denote one's gender identity or expression and the second denotes one's birth sex, is an attempt to express the ambiguities of gendered realities. Of course, as transgender advocates and scholars have argued, the hyphenated pronoun might move sex and gender beyond either/or male/female terms, suggesting that they do not have to match, but it still nonetheless relies on the idea that "sex," as a biological construct, and "gender," as a socially expressive construct, are defined differently (Girshick 2008). For transgender scholars, who often rely on a more heavily deconstructionist politic, this is problematic. It is not quite ambiguous enough.

In all of these examples, hyphenation is used in a more general sense to recognize ambivalences, ambiguities, classificatory disputes, and even the limits of language. This does not necessarily mean that hyphenation is politically transformative or necessarily opens up classifications. It can be equally restrictive. Yet hyphenation arguably also draws our attention to categories that may be embedded in moments of "crisis" (Garber 1992:17). As evidenced by disputes over the fetus-infant, victim-survivor, and he-she, hyphenation can be an important metalinguistic signal for struggles over classification, a potentially revealing discursive arrangement not yet fully theorized. After all, it was the use of the hyphen that led to the intense debate among Daimler Motor Company stockholders over whether to return the company name to "Daimler-Benz" (Landler 2007). And taken more broadly, even ethnographic debates over researcher/subject boundaries (Spivak 1988; Fine 1994; Visweswaran 1994) and subsequent efforts to reframe the positionality of researchers have become known as "working the hyphen" (Fine 1994). With such observations in hand, attention to the hyphen may open up new



insights not only for processes of identity construction and classification, but also may have important implications for research related to cognitive orientations, studies of ambiguity, and the processes and politics of classification in general. At the very least, whether in its literal or conceptual form, “working the hyphen” requires us to recognize our “own authorship of the human world” (Berger and Luckmann 1966:89). It is social actors after all, who hyphenate. And the debates that emerge over the hyphen and renderings of certain identities as hyphenated, clearly extends hyphenation beyond matters of grammar. Rather than a neutral mark of punctuation, it can be a sign with a social, cognitive, and moral function.

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