

THAT'S SO GHETTO:  
A STUDY OF THE RACIAL/SOCIOECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS  
ASSOCIATED WITH THE TERM "GHETTO"

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The term “ghetto” has an ambiguous meaning in American society. The term frequently has been used as either a noun or an adjective. As a noun the term “ghetto” is often used to describe a place- Small describes the ghetto as a: “...a particular *type* of neighborhood; it exhibits a cohesive set of characteristics, such as deteriorating housing, crime, depopulation, and social isolation...”(2008: 78.) This description as a noun is indicative of unsavory social conditions and climate that fosters an unproductive populace. As an adjective the term remains more difficult to solidly define. The bulk of available research often has worked to define what the “ghetto” is in reference to a physical location. The term seems to be more pervasive than simply being a place; it can be used to describe people, particular behaviors and traits as well as objects.

The current study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of what a ‘ghetto’ is and how the word is used in a variety of ways. This study will analyze the multifaceted applications of the term ‘ghetto’ and how the term works to promote negative socioeconomic racialized ideologies. This study is pertinent because it addresses issues of institutionalized discrimination and prejudiced language. Findings are predicted to address the manners in which discrimination functions through language usage.

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## INTRODUCTION

The “ghetto” has been a topic for scholarly discourse for decades now. Often rhetoric concerned with the ghetto is catered to understanding the neighborhoods that have been classified as “ghettos”. The South-Side of Chicago and New York City’s Harlem more often than not find themselves placed into the categories of quintessential “ghettos” in literature (Haynes and Hutchinson 2008). Both neighborhoods display the racial/ethnic homogeneity, low-income, social isolation and economic oppression that seem to encompass the traditionally defined “ghetto” (2008). However, rhetoric concerned with “ghetto” has not always been uniform. Jargowsky and Bane (1991) refute the traditional connotation with race that the American ghetto seems to imply. Instead they broaden the ghetto to be any neighborhood in which the poverty rate is above 40%, regardless of racial/ethnic composition. Of course, there were scholars who disagreed with the removal of racial and cultural implications from the ghetto, and called into question the validity of the term’s inability to be associated with race.

This project’s exploration of the term “ghetto” seeks to provide further insight on the racial/socioeconomic implications of the word. This project is unique in that it explores the term “ghetto” in its entirety. This project asserts that ghetto extends beyond just the neighborhood in which traditional literature has devoted itself to. The literature is nearly devoid of the use of ghetto as an adjective, a manner that it is often used in in everyday speech and jargon. The diverse perspectives provided for what defines the characteristics of ghetto as a place deserve to be applied to the term holistically. Ghetto is more than a place. It has proven to be dynamic and versatile in its usage.

## **“THE GHETTO” AND ITS HISTORY OF RACE AND INCOME**

The ghetto has been a term that seems to have its history rooted in racial and socioeconomic conditions. The earliest usage of the modern day term “ghetto” dates to fifteenth century Italy in which Spanish Jews (known as *the Marrani*) were forced unto the island ghetto Nuovo on the northwest edge of Venice, after an infectious outbreak was attributed to the arrival of the *Marrani* (Haynes and Hutchison, 2008). The term “ghetto” itself is rooted in the Italian verb “gettare” meaning “to pour” (2008) and quite literally the estimated 700 Jews of Venice poured into the designated ghetto that Italian law mandated them to occupy. True to the socioeconomic connotations of the modern day term “ghetto”, Jews of Ghetto Nuovo and other designated ghettos, were prohibited from owning their own land, paid fees to the Italian government and were policed regularly by the Venetian authority to ensure their stasis within their designated districts. Although the term has come into usage in more recent years to reference communities of color, often Black communities; many of the same tactics used to subordinate the Jews of the ghetto are now in use for the occupants of the American ghetto.

## **AN OVERVIEW ON THE AMBIGUITY OF THE WORD “GHETTO”**

In her ethnography/content analysis, Pattillo (2003) challenges scholar William Julius Wilson’s definition of what a ghetto is. Pattillo criticizes Wilson’s approach to defining a “ghetto” by deviating from Wilson’s interpretation of a space that is marked by constant social and economic disparities in addition to social and financial deprivation. Pattillo creates a more homogenous space in which a ghetto can exist and be defined. The primary differentiation between Pattillo and Wilson’s ghetto rests in Pattillo asserting a multi-encompassing model that includes the paradigmatic low-income, socially excluded inhabitants of a ghetto but also those inhabitants of a middle and upper class background that generally enjoy higher levels of autonomy. In contrast to the diversified conceptualization of a ghetto asserted by Pattillo, Wilson’s assessment of a ghetto focuses on a homogenized population /community that is attached to the notion of the welfare state and stands in opposition to mainstream societal ideals such as marriage and non-criminal activities. Pattillo engages in an in-depth analysis of Chicago’s west and south sides to illustrate the complexity of a ghetto and to strengthen her thesis which calls for a larger encompassing and understanding of predominately black segregated communities which she defines as being “ghettos.” Pattillo analyzes the heterogeneity of two of Chicago’s predominately black neighborhoods: Groveland and Kenwood. Pattillo

highlights the diversity in prestige and class standing in both environments which further strengthens her point that although both neighborhoods are classified as being ghettos, a ghetto should not and cannot be synonymized with poverty. Furthermore Pattillo challenges the idea of a ghetto being homogenous by highlighting the citizenry of Groveland and Kenwood which consist of makeshift auto mechanics to high ranking elected Chicago officials.

Pattillo analyzes the usage of the term ghetto itself. Drawing from interviews of inhabitants of both Groveland and Kenwood, the term ghetto asserts itself as an ambiguous term that is seemingly connected to being, or appearing to be, poor. In one interview, a resident of Groveland located on Chicago's south-side rejects the notion of her neighborhood being identified as a "ghetto" and instead classifies it as an "intermediary." By this the resident means her neighborhood is a place not marked by the prestige of a suburb nor the undesirability as Chicago's west-side which she identifies as being a ghetto. The predominating difference between the south and west-sides of Chicago being that the west-side of Chicago is typically linked to higher concentrations of poverty. In this example, a ghetto is an area that is perceived to be poor and undesirable to reside in. In another example, the term "ghetto" is used by another resident of Chicago's south-side to describe the type of aesthetic that will be gained by the Kenwood neighborhood if a car repair business is allowed to operate out of a local family's garage. Once more, the idea of what it means for something to be "ghetto" or a ghetto is analogous to negativity and undesirability.

In his study of the factors that define the makings of a "ghetto", Wacquant (1997) asserts that the idea of a ghetto is a racialized concept. Wacquant defends this position by citing what he

views as the “dilution of the notion of ghetto simply to designate an urban area of widespread and intense poverty...” (Wacquant 341.) Wacquant proposes that the conception of ‘the ghetto’ cannot be divorced from blacks due to the historical and sociological racialized poverty and oppression that is unique to blacks. Furthermore, Wacquant asserts that this oppression is a particular form of discrimination that has only been enacted on blacks and black inhabitants of ‘ghettos.’ Arguing against a conceptualization of a deracialized ghetto; Wacquant asserts that a ghetto defined merely by lower socioeconomic echelon with no regards to race or organizational makeup; makes the term ghetto an arbitrary term that can be assigned to populations whom have not been the receivers of institutionalized racist “ghettoization.”

The argument of Wacquant and Pattillo lies in their agreement that the construction of “the ghetto” is a concept that is inextricably connected to blacks and to black poverty. Both researchers do not disagree with “the ghetto” being synonymous with blackness, they disagree with the ghetto being synonymous with black poverty. Wacquant like Pattillo denies that a ghetto can be intrinsically linked to poverty and cites the Bronzeville of 1940s Chicago as evidence of a fervent black middle/upper-class that resides within the “ghettos,” therefore proof of an economically and socially diverse black population. What is imperative to note in both researchers’ works is a call to broaden the definition of what a “ghetto” is and how it can be defined and what Wacquant strongly rallies for is a deeper and more relative of understanding of ghetto culture. Wacquant does not argue against the assumptions of the word itself but instead argues against the ideas that have been societally ascribed to the term ghetto such as the ideas of disorganization, anomie and exoticized racial difference. These things among others, form what

Wacquant refers to as an “epistemological obstacle” which prevent a true understanding of the ghetto.

In opposition to the conclusions of Pattillo and Wacquant’s expansion of what a ghetto should be defined as, Small (2008) asserts that the concept of the “ghetto” should be abandoned entirely. Small’s basis for the dismantling of the conceptualization of “a ghetto” rests upon what he refers to as a commonly referenced “strong conception” of the ghetto that is frequently used to explain phenomena that appear to be unique of ghettos. Small disagrees with these “strong conceptions” of the ghetto because they create an idea of homogeneity within ghettos but fail to account for the overwhelming heterogeneous nuances that makeup the concept of “the ghetto.” Small addresses the idea that a common assumption of what a ghetto is often encompasses the notion of a poor, black, neighborhood that is marked by desolation, depopulation, and violent crime. In his findings, Small finds that not only are poor black neighborhoods often not depopulated and not marked by low organizational densities, but also that patterns of crime in one ghetto are often unique and indigenous to that ghetto. Also addressed in Small’s analysis of what constitutes a ghetto, is the frequently cited notion of poor, black, neighborhoods (which are designated to be “the ghetto”) being predominately poor and black due to state influence over housing, zoning and related structural issues. Small claims that to solely blame state actions or inactions for the creation of predominately black and poor neighborhoods is to fail to account for the fact that many blacks prefer to live among other blacks. Small does acknowledge the role of discriminatory practices that act as a “constraint” to the choices in housing for many blacks but calls residential segregation a “complex combination of institutional and interpersonal, economic and cultural, majority-driven and minority-driven factors” (Small 395).

## **Deviating From Race: A Socioeconomic Perspective of the Term**

While the term “ghetto” often finds itself within the same context as race, the term has often been used in an attempt to describe cases of socioeconomic disparity. Walks and Bourne (2006) refer to a growing “ghettoization” of particular urban Canadian cities. The idea of ghettoization referred to by Walks and Bourne’s is marked by two unique characteristics that make them “ghettos”. Those traits are being a member of a “visible minority” group and having a high poverty rate. Walks and Bourne (2006) speak of “...the spectre of ghettoization emerging within Canadian cities along the lines witnessed in the United States, a spectre fuelled by media reporting of violent crimes potentially linked to minorities and to gangs...” (pg. 274). The ghettoization noted here is not only linked to minorities and gangs but also distinguished by violent crime. What is inferred from this is the idea of social disorganization, an idea that both Wacquant (1997) and Small (2008) identify in their own research as being commonly attributed to ghettos. It appears to be problematic for Walks and Bourne to segregate the concepts of a ghetto and of minorities being ubiquitous to it. Walks and Bourne critique the practice of interchangeably using the terms ‘ghetto’ ‘underclass’ and ‘high poverty’, designating that a ghetto is uniquely a symbiosis of ethnic segregation *and* concentrated poverty. So then according to this specific relationship a ghetto is certainly marked by a high concentration of poverty but also a racial/ethnic component and it is these two things distinctly that create a functioning “ghetto”.

Drawing heavily from high poverty rates as well as racial composition, Murphy (2007) references the “suburban ghettos” as areas located outside or on the peripheries of U.S central cities. Although never explicitly defining a ghetto or what constitutes a ghetto, Murphy refers to

suburban ghettos as places distinguished by their poverty rates and low-income residents. Murphy also identifies many of the suburban ghettos as areas that have relatively high levels of minority populations. Similarly seen in the research of Walks and Bourne (2006), the use of the term ghetto is commonly seen when referring to populations of high poverty levels but the term is seemingly reserved to designate environs with large populations of minority group members.

### **What's in a Word? Power of Language & Parallel's Between "Ghetto" and Other Terms**

The term ghetto undoubtedly carries more than a designation for a particular type of neighborhood. 'Ghetto' is a charged word and this is indicative by the plethora of scholarly debate associated with what makes a ghetto into a ghetto, as well as what can be characterized as befitting for a ghetto. The blatant association of the term with poverty, minorities (particularly Blacks and Latinos) and crime makes it difficult not to perceive 'ghetto' as an epithet. Embrick and Henricks (2013) call for a deeper understanding of the symbolic meanings of epithets and further they assert that racial epithets maintain systems of white supremacy both materially and symbolically. To directly apply this concept to the term 'ghetto', what can be noted is the disproportionate designation of the term 'ghetto' in reference to the Black and Latino urban poor. The exclusivity of this term for only poverty begotten brown persons creates a "racialized social system" [Embrick and Henricks (2001)], this racial system that has the ability to ascribe particular individuals as being of or belonging to the ghetto, which does not enjoy favorable perception. Embrick and Henricks reference the power of the term *nigger* and assert that not only is the term unquestionably connected to blacks but the term also has a distinct function when employed by the dominant group; the function of '*nigger*' primarily being to exclude and signify

inferiority. Ghetto, if used as an epithet must function in a manner similar to '*nigger*'; ostracizing members of the urban colored poor and signifying them as subordinates.

Language is utilized to communicate in an explicit manner but also to convey underlying ideologies and prejudices. Guerin (2003) observes that "People do not openly slander members of other racial groups but they still subtly talk in prejudicial ways when safe to do so" (Guerin 30). While Guerin analyzes prejudicial talk in terms of race; the subtle prejudicial talk can be directly applicable to avenues such as class. The term "ghetto" could be a manifestation of what Guerin refers to as "prejudicial talk"; acting as an implicit way to degrade those of a lower socioeconomic bracket or of ethnic descent. If the term "ghetto" holds the prejudicial attributes that this literature review hypothesizes, then the use of the term in reference to others alters the perception of those things or people whom are classified as "ghetto". Guerin analyzes that "...we frequently talk in order to convince people to construct things in a certain way..." (Guerin 31).

It is arguable that the term "ghetto" carries some parallelisms to the N-word of the American English language. In his analysis of the N-word, Kennedy states "[The N-word] is fascinating precisely because it has been put to a variety of uses and can radiate a wide array of meanings" (Kennedy 34). The same conclusion can be drawn for the term "ghetto". While the term carries with it a hypothesized amount of racial and socioeconomic discrimination (Wacquant 1997) it appears to be an amorphous term that implies various things to different populations.

## **Other Words to Denote Racial/Sociocultural Significance**

The term ‘ghetto’ is not unique in its use to describe a particular group of people. “Redneck” is a similarly used term applied most often to whites of a rural, poorer and working class background (Shirley 2010). Shirley interrogates the methods of the use and designation of the term ‘redneck’ and the implications that the term carries in reference to Southern whites. What is noted within the research is the unique designation of ‘redneck’ to a particular type of white person; most notably a white from the south that is often of a perceived lower class. The ways in which the term ‘redneck’ is employed has definite parallels to the ways in which the term ‘ghetto’ can be utilized. Similarly to ‘redneck’, ‘ghetto’ is a word that is uniquely indicative of particular ethnic groups; most often blacks and Latinos. What becomes evident is that certain words are used to designate particular groups of people in opposition to the racialized *other*. In the same manner that ‘redneck’ is used intra-rationally to denote a white that is unlike the mainstream ideal of whiteness, ‘ghetto’ seems to be used both intra-rationally and inter-rationally to categorize blacks and Latinos whom are in one form or another deviations from mainstream American racial ideals.

Although there are many comparisons that can be made between the terms ‘ghetto’ and ‘redneck’, the deviation between them resides in the use of each of the terms as a pejorative. Similarly to the notion asserted by Embrick and Henricks (2013) the use of racialized epithets to describe whites does not seem to severely affect their life chances in the same manner that it does people of color. While the term redneck carries with it the idea of a lower class, racist white (Murphy 2010) whites whom are considered rednecks have seemingly recaptured the term and “...used it as an expression of solidarity and intra-racial resistance in order to identify as honest,

hard-working common folk” [Shirley (2001)]. The “redneck” in this sense is very amorphous, being able to be both a term of endearment among those whom are labeled it and also being able to be wielded as an epithet. In opposition to this, ‘ghetto’ or ‘the ghetto’ appears to be a stoic term, with the populations that it is used to describe often distancing themselves from the term and its implications (Pattillo 2003). The comedian Jeff Foxworthy has described the term ‘redneck’ as having “a glorious lack of sophistication” (Davies 184). What has frequently failed to be seen is the same celebrated use of the paralleled term ‘ghetto’.

### **The Role of Internalization and Affected Perception**

Research has evidenced that stereotypes can often become entrenched and internalized by both the subjugated and the subjugators. The oppression of the black woman in American society is an example of the ways in which internalization of tropes are harmful to the well-being of those upon which such beliefs are impressed. As cited by bell hooks (1981) The “devaluation” of black women in society is evidenced through continued portrayals of her in racialized and demonized stereotypes that have painted the common image of the sassy and sexual black Sapphire or Jezebel persona. The internalization of stereotypic notions of black women as sexually deviant and in perpetual “want” of sex has resulted in excused and unacknowledged sexual assault committed against them by both white and black men. It becomes evident that ideology and stereotypic logic greatly influence the life chances and circumstances of those populations that it is applied to, often excusing the injustices perpetrated against them.

## **POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF “GHETTO”**

Literature has supported the idea that “ghetto” is a term that carries a significant level of racial/socioeconomic negativity to its usage. This study seeks to explore the potential effects that terms such as “ghetto” carry in its use, especially how it may further instances of racial oppression, white supremacy and institutionalized discrimination. This study also seeks to understand the potential consequences that terms such as “ghetto” may have on students on a college campus.

### **Racial Privilege and Power**

Research and literature has largely linked the term “ghetto” or “the ghetto” to neighborhoods that are largely if not entirely Black (Pattillo, 2008; Wacquant, 1997; Small, 2008). Due to the trend in the literature to associate the 21<sup>st</sup> century usage of the term “ghetto” to the Black community, often by White scholars; it is necessary to understand some of the racialized social power and dynamics between the Blacks and Whites and how this term “ghetto” may factor into those social power dynamics. McIntosh (1988) presents the concept of an “invisible backpack” of unseen and unearned privilege and power retained by Whites. This invisible backpack allows a huge amount of privilege in which Whites can move throughout society freely, “cashing in” on advantages that are granted to them because of their race and by default disadvantaging those who are non-white. For example, the fact that African Americans accumulate wealth and financial capital at a rate that is significantly less than White Americans (Hawkins and Maurer, 2012) and that Whites in the US on average earn higher salaries regardless of educational levels (Hawkins et. al, 2012; Adelman, 2004; Pattillo, 2005;

Pattillo-McCoy 1999). Even the use of the term “ghetto” in literature seems to at the very least insinuate the potentiality of minority and not White filled spaces, particularly Black occupied. This insinuation of a neighborhood that is distinctly Black, would not be a bad thing if the term did not carry overwhelmingly negative connotations in its usage and the populations it describes (Small, 2008). This suggests that because “the ghetto” seemingly lacks positive overtones, and is distinctly connected to Blacks, the usage of the term could serve to disenfranchise those it is used to describe. Whites are generally overrepresented in literature as scholars defining “the ghetto” but underrepresented as the actual inhabitants of these socially anomic areas called “ghettos”. Recalling McIntosh’s invisible backpack, it seems that a privilege that whites may enjoy is that the use of the term “ghetto” often excludes them while it includes Blacks. It seems that Blacks are left to manage the definition of a term that was not created by them but used for them.

### **Double Consciousness**

DuBois (1903/1995) presents the idea of the Black individual possessing two-selves; one of which exists within the Black culture and society and the other of which perceives itself and acts within the rules of White society. Those immersed or placed into the culture of the “ghetto”, with all of its negativity; engage in forms of social performances as attempts to distance themselves from a place or an environment which society at large views as socially unstable and wrought with societal ills (Anderson, 1999). Anderson (1999) discovered that youth living in areas designated as “ghettos” lived and engaged in two separate social spheres. One sphere in which they performed presentations of self (often the image of hyper toughness) within the ghetto to lessen probabilities of criminality against themselves and the other in which they attempted to engage with a larger White society which was not comfortable with presentations

of self within the ghetto. Even if youth from the ghetto did not perform a “ghetto” presentation of self, non-Black employers often still did not hire them or released them from employment, out of fear that the youth could and would engage in the behavior of the ghetto: aggressive, criminally predisposed and troublesome. It seems that if one wishes to progress in a wider society, they must actively distance themselves from anything that is representative of the ghetto. In this manner, Blacks must constantly be aware of the ways in which they are perceived by Whites and non-Whites as to not be perceived as being from the ghetto.

### **Higher Education and Race**

According to Brunson, Brown and Placier (2012) race often finds itself presented in invisible forms on the college campus. White privilege is furthered by an overrepresentation of Eurocentric history and culture (2012). The lack of ethnic minority culture and history at the university level lead White students to ignore the benefits of their Whiteness on the college campus, and how their Whiteness marginalizes other non-White groups. The marginalization of ethnic minorities on campus is largely ignored because prior to their entry to college, most White students have never been instructed on issues of racism, discrimination or of other Whites who have fought for equality for non-Whites. These issues of racialized privilege and invisibility on the college campus have caused White students to view themselves and others as completely individualized (2012). Due to the ability of Whites (particularly males) being able to demand and receive justice and rights for themselves individually, the processing of group demands for justice seem foreign. The concept of not being able to separate ones identity from the entire group seems foreign. This means that a White student may not understand how a term such as “ghetto” when applied to one Black student at their job, has an effect on the perception of every

other Black person that also works at that job, as they begin to measure what factors contribute to that one Black being ghetto and the others falling somewhere on a continuum of more ghetto or less ghetto. White students (particularly White males) view their college experiences as the “norm” due to a lack of exposure to faculty of color, an overrepresentation of white and male administrators and environments that do not foster diversity or multiculturalism (Cabrera, 2012). Systems that operate outside of these systems of Whiteness then become alien and strange. The ghetto with its systems of social disorganization, anomie, criminality, oppression and economic bleakness stands in stark contrast to Whiteness and students from these areas are further marginalized from a space that is rarely designed for their out of norm experience.

## METHODS

I designed a quantitative survey in order to gain a statistical understanding of the perception of the term “ghetto”. The survey was meant to gain data that could be used to correlate, measure and analyze differences, similarities and patterns of a large sample’s perception of the term “ghetto”. This component of the research was conducted over a period of 4 months. An IRB approved online survey link was distributed to University of Central Florida faculty and staff to distribute to their students. The survey link was also distributed via social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook. Exactly 166 students participated in the online survey and 158 completed it in its entirety. I also conducted focus groups to further gain participant understanding and perception of the term “ghetto”. This component of the research project took place over a period of two weeks, during which the participants of three focus groups were recruited from predominately Black registered student organizations on the campus of UCF, as well as through emails from faculty and staff who were informed by me about the project. **In total 14 participants were recruited for the study.** Participants were told the premise of the research and only received refreshments for their participation in the study. This portion of the research encompassed transcriptions taken from audio recordings of the groups. Each transcription was completed solely by me, the primary researcher, although for two sessions there was a note-taker present to record and track relevant themes and topics. I documented accounts of participants’ experience with the term “ghetto”, although without guidance from myself as moderator; all groups began to interconnect the term “ghetto” with broader issues of race, economic issues, popular culture, cultural speech patterns and the incorporation of new phrases and words such as “ratchet”, into American society.

## **Variables for Quantitative Survey**

Four independent variables were used. The first was race/ethnicity. Participants were asked to check all that applied from the following list of classifications: 1.) Black, 2.) White, 3.) Latino, 4.) Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.) Native American, 6.) Multiracial. The second variable was gender. Participants were asked to select either male or female. The third variable that was measured was academic classification. Participants were asked to select their academic standing from the following classifications: 1.) Freshman, 2.) Sophomore, 3.) Junior, 4.) Senior.

*Dependent Variables:* Dependent variables that were measured were designed to understand perceptions of the term ‘ghetto’. Participants were asked to select what they associated the term “ghetto” more closely with. The answer options included a) Behavior, b) Income/Finances, c) Neighborhood/Environment, d) Intelligence (See Appendix B. for complete survey). To further measure participants’ perceptions of the word “ghetto” 6 likert scale questions were included. The answer options ranged from 1-Strongly disagree to 5-Strongly agree. For example: “In my opinion, the term “ghetto” is an offensive term: a) Strongly disagree, b) Disagree, c) Neither agree or disagree, d) Strongly agree e) Agree” (See Appendix B. for complete survey).

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

The majority of students were White (46.2%) and female (73.4%). Black students were the second largest group of participants representing 27.2% of the sample. The vast majority of participants identified as upperclassman, that is Junior (37.3%) and Senior (36.7%). Table 1 references specific percentages concerned with the demographics of the sample.

### **Defining Ghetto by Numbers**

As shown by the qualitative research, participants predominately viewed the term “ghetto” to be associated with 2 major themes: Behavior as well as Neighborhood/Environment (Table 2). When asked to select what the term “ghetto” was more closely associated with, 48.5% of participants linked the term to Neighborhood/Environment. As stated by many participants in the focus group, many participants in the online survey synonymized the term with an actual physical place. It can also be assumed that this physical construct of “the ghetto” carries with it high levels of negativity as an overwhelming majority (71.1%) of survey participants reported that they would not feel comfortable living in a neighborhood described as being “ghetto”.

**Table 1. Demographics of Sample**

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	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	42	26.6
Female	116	73.4
<i>Total</i>	158	100.0
<b>Race</b>		
Black	43	27.2
White	73	46.2
Hispanic	15	9.5
Asian	4	2.5
Multiracial	21	13.3
Native American	2	1.3
<i>Total</i>	158	100.0
<b>Academic Standing</b>		
Freshman	6	3.8
Sophomore	20	12.7
Junior	59	37.3
Senior	58	36.7
Graduate Student	15	9.5
<i>Total</i>	158	100.0

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**Table 2. Frequency of the Association of the term “Ghetto”**

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Association	%
Behavior	42.9
Income/Finances	6.7
Neighborhood/Environment	48.5
Intelligence	1.8

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Ghetto as a behavior was the second most common association of the term (See Table 2). As observed in the focus group, behavior displayed dynamic characteristics being something that was viewed as being strongly negative and very closely associated with minorities although not racist. When asked if the term “ghetto” was an offensive term, 39.6% of participants agreed. Similarly when asked if the word “ghetto” could be used positively, an overwhelming 42% disagreed. These numbers reflect the ideas that were expressed during the focus groups, of participants attributing negativity to the term and an inability to express positivity with “ghetto”.

### **Racialized Differences between Whites & Blacks**

Although this project measured the responses of several racial/ethnic groups (refer to Table 1), the bulk of the bivariate analyses that were used measure differences between Black and White participants. This was done for three reasons. The first is that White and Black participants were the two largest racial/ethnic groups who participated, the second is due to the historical connection of “ghetto” (traditionally referring to The ghetto as a place) to Blacks and finally because participants in the focus groups often cited racialized tensions between Blacks and Whites, that were only further exacerbated when racialized terms such as “ghetto” were used by the latter. An Independent Samples t-test between White and Black students revealed significant differences in the perception of the term “ghetto” being used most often to describe minorities (See Table 3). According to the data collected, Black students were more likely than their white counterparts to perceive the term “ghetto” as being used to describe minorities. This information correlates to the discussions in the focus groups amongst students that implied

Blacks perceived the term to be connected with Black culture by societal association. A cross-tabulation analysis revealed that 61% of Black students strongly agreed that the term “ghetto” was most often used to describe minorities. In comparison, only 15% of white students strongly agreed that the term “ghetto” was most often used to describe minorities. There were also significant differences between Black and White students in the use of the term “ghetto”. Black students were more likely to report the term being used as a description for a person or a person’s behavior (See Table 3.) The data showed that 37.2% of Black students strongly agreed that the term ghetto was most often used to describe a person or a person’s behavior, while only 11% of White students strongly agreed with the same statement. This information is interesting when considering the narratives disclosed in the focus groups in which many participants shared experiences of their White peers referring to them as “ghetto” after performing particular actions or behaviors. In fact White participants overwhelmingly (92%) correlated the term ghetto to an actual place. Considering that historically marginalized populations’ perceptions are rarely represented in literature, this divergent perception could serve as an explanation of the plethora of literature regarding “The ghetto” as the neighborhood, but a limited amount of studies catered to “ghetto” as a behavior.

However, there were also similarities between Black and White students concerning their perception of the term “ghetto”. For example, both Black and White students reported that they agreed that the term “ghetto” was an offensive term. This data further strengthens the idea that the term carries high levels of negativity and could possibly be utilized a slur. Both Black and White students also largely reported that they would feel comfortable befriending someone who was described as being “ghetto”; although both Blacks and Whites still reported a high level of

uncertainty (Neither Agree or Disagree) for the same question. Another similarity that both Black and White students shared with one another was a discomfort in occupying a space that was identified as being “ghetto”. 35% of Black students and 44% of White students strongly disagreed with the statement: “I would feel comfortable living in a neighborhood described as being “ghetto”. This information reveals yet another paradox associated with the term, being that both Black and White individuals report being willing to befriend someone who was “ghetto” but would not live in a space described as “ghetto”. This seems to imply that both groups are cognizant of the negativity associated with the term and would choose not to personally be associated with “ghetto” while simultaneously being comfortable with another person who is associated with “ghetto”.

**Table 3 Independent Sample T-test- Perception of the Term Ghetto for Black and White Students**

Measure*	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
The Term “ghetto” is Most Often Used to Describe Minorities					
Black	4.56	.590	7.217	112.49	.000
White	3.40	1.139			
The term “ghetto” is Most Often Used to Describe a Person or a Person’s Behavior					
Black	4.23	.718	5.424	111.145	.000
White	3.34	1.044			
The Term “ghetto” is an Offensive Word					
Black	3.56	.854	1.955	103.643	.062
White	3.21	1.067			
I Would Be Comfortable Befriending Someone Described Being “ghetto”					
Black	3.37	1.215	1.431	77.579	.187
White	3.05	1.039			

\*Note: Measured on a scale from 1-5; 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neither Agree or Disagree; 4=Agree;5=Strongly Agree

**Table 4 Independent Sample T-test- Perception of the Term Ghetto for Black and White Students**

Measure*	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
The term “ghetto” can be used positively					
Black	1.95	.987	-2.911	93.839	.020
White	2.53	1.107			
I would feel comfortable living in a neighborhood described as being “ghetto”					
Black	2.14	1.037	.960	91.032	.718
White	1.95	1.079			
The Term “ghetto” is a racist term					
Black	3.12	1.109	1.197	84.85	.529
White	2.86	1.097			
I Would Be Comfortable sending my child to a school described as being ”ghetto”					
Black	1.84	.814	.794	103.64	.062
White	1.71	.825			

\*Note: Measured on a scale from 1-5; 1=Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neither Agree or Disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree.

## **THE FOCUS GROUP**

Participants have been given pseudonyms. Participants were all students enrolled at UCF and all undergraduates with the exception of one Masters Student, all of Black descent and represented a wide array of majors and academic years. Participants were largely female (twelve out of fourteen.) Each focus group session occurred in an isolated board-room in a research office on the campus of UCF. Each individual focus group session lasted approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. Drawing from the analyses of these recorded interactions with the three groups, I interrogate as well as investigate the ways in which these black students perceive the word “ghetto” in a linguistic manner but also in a broader context of race, socioeconomics and cultural expression.

### **Methodology**

3 focus groups were conducted to further gain participant understanding and perception of the term “ghetto”. This component of the research occurred over a period of two weeks, during which the participants of three focus groups were recruited from predominately Black registered student organizations on the campus of UCF, as well as through emails from faculty and staff who were informed by me about the project. In total 14 participants were recruited for the study. Participants were told the premise of the research and only received refreshments for their participation in the study. Students were asked questions from a list of guiding questions (See Appendix C) although participants were also allowed to freely engage in any relevant dialogue concerning “ghetto” and its implications. This portion of the research encompassed transcriptions taken from audio recordings of the groups. Each transcription was completed

solely by me, the primary researcher, although for two sessions there was a note-taker present to record and track relevant themes and topics. An Excel database spreadsheet was used to compile focus group transcriptions. Within the spreadsheet, columns were made according to questions asked in each group. In each column, responses and dialogue were recorded and labeled by participant pseudonym and group number. After all comments and responses were entered into the Excel spreadsheet, common themes were examined by me and my honors in the major undergraduate thesis chair. The identified themes were categorized by 3 re-emerging topics: 1.) The lower socioeconomic neighborhood; 2.) The behavior and 3.) The ghetto as a racial construct.

## **RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP**

Although all participants established separate definitions of what ghetto meant to them or how they would define it, all participants discussed three common ideas concerning what ghetto most often meant when used.

### **The Socioeconomic Place**

The first and most prevalent theme that all participants seemed to discuss in their defining of the term ghetto was the idea of the term relating directly to having lower socioeconomic status and occupying an area that was very low-income. Every participant in each group agreed that the term definitively had a correlation to either being lower-income or having been from a lower-income neighborhood. Betty, a female with junior standing majoring in Communications links the word directly to a specific environment:

*BETTY:* ...it's like, oh you're from the hood...technically it's like the poorer areas and it wasn't narrowed down to a race.

Betty synonymizes her perception of the term ghetto with an actual physical place, "The hood", which to her is a place inhabited by individuals who are poor but not specifically defined by their race. More participants also seemed to perceive the term ghetto as an actual physical place, not specifically intertwined with race but distinctly designed for those of a lower socioeconomic standing:

*COURTNEY:* “I would just reference it to where you’re from because The ghetto is kinda related to the projects and related to low-income families”.-Courtney, sophomore, female, Pre-Clinical major

*JASMINE:* “...it describes certain areas that you’re from, which maybe lower income or which maybe run-down or maybe...places of poverty”. -Jasmine, senior, female, Pre-Clinical major

These comments seem to compliment the deteriorating and socially isolated neighborhood that Small (2008) provides as his definition of “the ghetto”. Betty references “the hood” and Courtney refers to “the projects”, both of these terms are direct references to specific neighborhoods that are often laced with crime and inhabitants who are socially stratified. What becomes apparent is that “to be ghetto” is to also have a connection an actual place which has unsavory social conditions and high levels of poverty.

### **The Dynamism of “Being Ghetto”**

To “act” ghetto or “to be” ghetto was something that one could easily do without being conscious of it. It could be anything or nothing at all. And most importantly, depending on who was accusing another of a ghetto behavior, the meaning could take on different meanings, although the negative connotation with the term never wavered. Being ghetto could be distinguished by particular actions, behaviors, styles, or presentation of self. These distinguishers of “ghetto” were overwhelmingly viewed by participants as negative attributes; things to be avoided or at the very least monitored. Failure of being conscious of certain behaviors could result in one being accused of “acting ghetto” or “being ghetto”. The most common ways in

which one could bring on accusations of being or acting ghetto were being loud, being obnoxious, being over the top, being aggressive or engaging in behavior that was misunderstood by whites. Several participants expressed that particular expressions of themselves, be they cultural or emotional could be interpreted by their white peers as ghetto.

*CASSIE:* ...because I had done step in elementary school, I wanted to do stepping and they (whites) were like "oh my God that's so ghetto!" And I feel like because they (whites) weren't used to it (stepping) and it was a black person, it was ghetto.

*ASHLEY:* ...personally if people call me ghetto it's because I have an attitude or something like that...I went to a predominately white high school and people would call me ghetto because I would get upset. But it wasn't like I was talking ghetto, I'm pretty articulate. But I feel like because I'm a black female, they automatically call me ghetto and in that context, I feel its derogatory.

Cassie, a female in her junior year and majoring in Pre-Clinical, recounted the experience of engaging in a behavior that was deemed “ghetto” after her performance with her step team at a predominately white middle school. Because stepping is a popular cultural dance form practiced in the African American community, Cassie viewed this distinct connection to Black culture as reason enough for her white peers to have perceived her performance as ghetto and thus a negative behavior. Similarly participant Ashley also a female junior double majoring in Spanish and Psychology shared a similar experience of being deemed ghetto for simply being upset. Ashley asserted that her annoyance in combination with her being a black female were enough to prompt her white peers to call her ghetto. Ashley felt the trope of the Angry Black Woman

thrust upon her by her white counter-parts. Ashley also shared that being upset was not the only way to stir accusations of being ghetto from white peers, it could literally be anything. Even having fun and being silly while being a black person in the presence of whites carried the potential of being labeled ghetto, which could greatly hinder life chances. Therefore, a constant need to be on one's best behavior at all times while with white peers was absolutely necessary:

*ASHLEY:* I know being in certain groups that are predominately white, I can't say or do certain things because that would make me "ghetto", that would discredit me and everything I worked hard for which is really annoying because sometimes you really wanna cut up or have fun but you can't....

Participants also used the word ghetto when they felt that others had engaged in behaviors that they deemed as unacceptable or saw as being socially taboo. Many participants saw no racial connotation when they used the term, but rather viewed it as a way to distinguish others who defied social mores:

*JASMINE:* Yeah, I have. [called someone ghetto] Just because the girl had purple, pink, blue like different colors in her hair. And I was like "That's ghetto...that's just too much."- Sophomore, female, Marketing major

*EARL:* I've used the term in my past...In the context to describe certain activities...someone whose being loud or obnoxious. -Junior, male, Mechanical Engineering major

In both contexts the participants used the word ghetto as descriptors for activities, behaviors and styles that they found to be unsatisfactory or unsavory. Earl shared that as a teenager, his use of the term ghetto as well as many of his peers use of the term was simply due to a lack of a more complex vocabulary:

*EARL:* ...I'd just say ghetto—"they dress ghetto" but that's just for lack of better terms. But you build up your vocabulary and then you say "he's wearing urban clothes."

Although Earl almost dismisses his use of the term as simply an elementary adjective or a filler, I found his linking the term ghetto specifically to "urban" to be fascinating and indicative that the term was not meaninglessly used as just another adjective, but similarly to the way Jasmine used the term, to as a method of distinguishing someone as being not only different but also strongly or stereotypically "urban". Other participants seemed to echo these same sentiments:

*CASSIE:* I would relate it more so to how you act and more like your demeanor. Something that's not socially acceptable ...

Many participants also presented another perspective of the term ghetto, one that had potentially positive aspects to it, but still carried an overall negative connotation. One of the ways in which participants reported using the term ghetto or hearing the term being used was as an expression of innovation and ingenuity. Participants expressed ways in which something

described as being “ghetto” by others was often something that was an individual act of ingenuity done in a time of circumstance and need. These expressions of ingenuity were in all cases still not enough to warrant praise for being quick-witted or clever; instead they were used as a way to express distaste and dissatisfaction.

*JASMINE:* Like if my hair-tie breaks and I make another one really quick, people are like: “Why you so ghetto...just buy another one!” I think it’s more so in reference to things that are...how do I say it? Half-assed? Make-shift. You use the resources you have to make something real quick. It’s not name-brand, it’s not high-quality but it works for you in that moment.

*RENEE:* ...I had a Lincoln Continental and it was an older car and it wouldn’t run so I rigged it with a rubberband or something...and she [her friend] was like “that is so ghetto!” She was like “You need to get another car.”

Both Jasmine and Renee displayed innovative tactics in order to change their particular unfortunate circumstances, and in both situations their ability to make use of the seemingly unusable resulted in the young women being deemed “ghetto” by their peers. This is interesting particularly because their actions could perhaps be viewed as positive, being that both Jasmine and Renee used creativity to alter unsatisfying circumstances in their favor. However, both Jasmine and Renee expressed a negative association of the term in which their peers not only deemed their expressions of innovation as “ghetto” but also implored them to purchase new items in place of the damaged ones that had been altered.

## **Racialization of “Ghetto”**

Many participants assumed that the majority of the population, who were non-black, presumed that the term “ghetto” was a word that carried racial implications specifically referring to Blacks when it was used. Participants also felt that within the Black community individuals accepted that the term was connected with Blacks because of the majority’s association of the word with race, although they felt that Blacks did not personally perceive ghetto as a term necessarily connected to any particular racial/ethnic group:

*BETTY:* I guess because it’s [the term ghetto] the way its portrayed. Like in the media, it’s portrayed as being associated with black people...

Participants also expressed that the meaning of ghetto could change depending on who used the term. Many participants expressed that the term could potentially be offensive when coming from a white person. If a white used the term ghetto it could be a reference to one’s race and was most often interpreted as disparaging and offensive:

*KIM:* I feel like it [the term ghetto] can be condescending coming from a person of Caucasian descent. Like they’re saying that all African Americans are ghetto, like it just seems like a derogatory term coming from a person of Caucasian descent---

*RENEE*: I think with a white person, are you [the white person] referring to a racial thing or are you referring to the condition itself? And with a minority thing, it's like a mutual understanding; it's a shared knowledge because....we know whatever we're talking about.

Participant Kim was a female in her sophomore year; she found the use of the term ghetto by whites in general to be offensive and derogatory. Similarly participant Renee felt as though the use of the term by Blacks in comparison to Whites was separated by a “mutual understanding” of the dynamics and knowledge of the term that Whites did not or could not partake in nor understand. These responses reflect some of the same complexities found in the use of the controversial N word. Both Renee and Kim saw the use of the term ghetto by whites to be distinctly racial and bordering on offensive terminology. Renee’s “mutual understanding” of the term ghetto by minorities indicates a similar type of racial understanding that users of the N word in the Black American community engage in as a form of racialized solidarity, community and presentation of self within Black environments (Rahman 2011).

### **“Ratchet” as the New “Ghetto”**

Within each group of participants there was a large pool of individuals who felt that in contemporary society the term “ratchet” was more often used than “ghetto”. Similarly to “ghetto”, “ratchet” carried a negative connotation, although “ratchet” was often used in jest or playful banter and lacked the incendiary implications that “ghetto” carried. Participants overwhelmingly expressed that “ratchet” was limited only to an individual’s behavior, and was a term that was used to describe anyone who was disdainfully immoderate. Anyone could be

“ratchet”, regardless of socioeconomic standing or racial background. Compared to “ghetto”, “ratchet” lacked an actual place with specific identifiable markers. This meant that participants were aware of places known as “Ghettos” which were marked by socioeconomic and racial disparities, but they knew nothing of places referred to as “Ratchets”, which made it more possible for anyone to be “ratchet”:

*RENEE:* But there’s also not a racial...I don’t know, I think “ghetto” refers to race, whereas ratchet is sort of...you know it when you see it kind of thing.

*ASHLEY:* I think ratchet describes more of the behavior and the way you carry yourself...But kinda like how ghetto references a place, I don’t think ratchet references a place.

*DORIS:* I think it’s used in the same way that “ghetto” is used, it’s just more people can be...more people can be ratchet. –female, junior, sociology major

*CASSIE:* ...The way I’ve seen it [ratchet] used, it’s not confined to just black people.

## IMPLICATIONS

Findings from the research suggest that the term “ghetto” carries definite socioeconomic implications in its use, and it more often than not has the potential to connote negative racial/cultural overtones. This paper studies the way in which the term “ghetto” operates in its use as a negative epithet, as well as exploring the ways how terms such as “ghetto” have the potential of negatively affecting students on the college campus. And how terms such as “ghetto” can further instances of institutionalized discrimination.

### **Racial Power**

Participants in the focus groups reported that the label of “ghetto” was not only negative but was also particularly detrimental when coming from a White counter-part. Recalling the narrative that Ashley shared about her label of “acting ghetto” from her White peers often came from her displaying displeasure, anger or wanting to act in an unrestrained manner. Other participants shared similar narratives of being labeled “ghetto” after engaging in similar behaviors in front of white peers, thus suggesting the stereotypes of the aggressive, angry or obnoxious Black person can all be emblematic for the descriptor of “ghetto” as a behavior. Literature has supported the idea that racialized stereotypes serve as a means to further instances of racial oppression and white supremacy (Brunsma et. al 2012; Shipler, 1998). Ashley shared that she constantly monitors her behavior as to not be deemed ghetto and thus not to “discredit” her and all of her hard-work. Ashley’s fear of losing credibility by her white peers and thus losing her likelihood of success in school implies that the opinion of Whites matters significantly in the chances that one has to succeed. Therefore, the approval of White counterparts appears to

be critical to Blacks in their presentation of self. If the presentation of self is in a manner that Whites perceive as a stereotypic Black behavior, then the label of “ghetto” may be used against them thus reducing the credibility of the Black whose behavior has been called into question.

### **The Two-Selves**

This was another aspect that the term “ghetto” seemed to encompass in its usage. Participants expressed the idea of being two different persons: one being the person who could potentially be “ghetto” and the other that was the opposite of ghetto, one that was White or White acting:

*DANIELLE:* I think as black people, we’re given two different identities. Either you act ghetto or you act white. I don’t know what acting black is without “ghetto” being attached to it.

Danielle distinctly connects the idea of being “ghetto” to being Black. She acknowledges the attachment of the term to her community and furthermore she acknowledges that she has never known what it means to “act black” without the association of negativity being attached to it. It is worth mentioning that Danielle says that her black identity is her ghetto identity. In the survey, Black students overwhelmingly strongly disagreed with the idea that the term “ghetto” could be used positively. This was echoed by many participants in the focus groups, seeming to indicate that this ghetto black identity referenced by Danielle is not one that is favored by many.

If one hopes to not hinder their chances at success, then they must avoid engaging in this ghetto Identity which is also serves as their Black identity. They are in a constant state of aligning themselves with Whiteness and White culture in order to be taken seriously and not ridiculed,

shamed or deemed “ghetto”. These forms of Whiteness that participants acknowledged engaging in could be speech, dress or behavior:

*JESSICA:* ...I don’t know if African Americans back in the day had to act a certain way or dress a certain, or talk a certain way in order to come into their (white society’s) circle. I feel like now, Black people have become accustomed to identifying those differences...”

### **Race in Higher Education**

It seemed that being “ghetto” was simply something that was not in congruence with education. According to participant responses in both the quantitative and qualitative study, “ghetto” was not something that could often be positively linked to an education:

*KIM:* ...There is no positive that can come out of that term and I wouldn’t want my child in an environment that would be uncondusive to their learning.

Participants in the focus groups often attributed the idea of “ghetto” applied to a school often meant violence, distraction, economic disparity for resources and not in alignment with White values:

*JESSICA:* ...In this discussion we have been making it seem as though the students in these “ghetto” schools aren’t getting professional development or learning how to interact with a White society....I don’t feel like talking “proper” or professional or getting good jobs is a White thing...I think African Americans can do it too.

So although Jessica was a participant that disagreed with the validity of the claims that “ghetto” schools or a ghetto educational culture was conducive to academic success, she also acknowledged that the salient perception of the ghetto as it relates to education was racialized

and rooted in learning how to be a member of White society. Jessica's perception is in direct alignment with what the literature has repeatedly proven to be true: students are predominately given notions of White supremacy both in the class and out (Brunsma et al, 2012; Cabrera, 2012) and that to be "ghetto" is to be in direct opposition to what it means to receive a White education.

## CONCLUSION

The term “ghetto” remains a term that is incredibly dynamic and complex in its usage and its perception. Conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of this study is that the term carries definite socioeconomic and racial implications. The term can be used interchangeably as a person, place or thing; but never wavering in its implicit or explicit message of negativity. With an overall agreement of the offensiveness of the term, there are definite differences between White and Black perception of the word “ghetto”. Whites perceive its usage to be more indicative of an actual place or environment and therefore not as correlated with race, while Blacks perceive the term to be a word of racial/socioeconomic scrutiny attributed to various things ranging from behavior to attire to speech. As language continuously evolves, it is imperative to have a solid understanding of the ways in which words can be used to further instances of implicit bias, exclusion or even ridicule. “Ghetto” is only one of many coded words used to express ideas and messages that would otherwise never be acceptable to say in everyday speech and conversation. On a college campus this is particularly important as to not hinder the academic and personal successes of an ever growing population of students who are from marginalized and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

This study has added to the existing literature regarding “The Ghetto”. However, it has begun a discussion on the ways in which the term is not limited to just an environment or a neighborhood; which comprises the bulk of research done on the term “Ghetto”. Findings in this study can also be used regarding prejudiced or racialized language. As evidenced by Embrick and Henricks (2008) racialized language, particularly racial epithets and slurs have detrimental effects on marginalized populations. This study revealed that not only do many Black students

associate the term “ghetto” to their own culture, but also that Black students actively engage in behaviors as to reduce their chances of being perceived as “ghetto”. This active engagement of avoiding particular actions and behaviors as to present oneself differently to a larger society as to not hinder life chances is reminiscent of DuBois’ concept of double consciousness (1903). The literature gives an unfavorable image of what “ghetto” is and all that it encompasses. Small calls for a complete abandonment of the term because of the homogenous negativity associated with it, and Wacquant attaches a complex history to the word which incorporates racial and economic oppression. While views may diverge on how to define the term or what can be categorized as ghetto, one thing can be ascertained; there are not very many who are eager to be identified as being “ghetto” or to live in “the ghetto”.

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## **APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL OF RESEARCH**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Amy M. Donley and Co-PI: Shaun A. Richardson**

Date: **November 27, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 11/27/2013, the IRB approved the following minor modification to human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Modification Type: Additional questions have been added to the survey and the revised survey has been uploaded to the study in iRIS.  
Project Title: "That's So Ghetto": The Racial and Cultural Implications Associated with the Term "Ghetto"  
Investigator: Amy M. Donley  
IRB Number: SBE-13-09416  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 11/27/2013 11:15:00 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

## **APPENDIX B: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY**

1. Have you ever used the term: “Ghetto”?
  - a.) Yes b.) No
2. If yes, then how did you use the term “ghetto”? Select all that apply
  - a. To describe a person/people
  - b. To describe a place
  - c. To describe a behavior
  - d. To describe an object or item
3. In your opinion, the term “ghetto” is more associated with which of the following:  
Select one
  - a. Behavior
  - b. Income/Finances
  - c. Neighborhood/Environment
  - d. Intelligence
4. In my opinion, the term ‘ghetto’ is an offensive term:
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree or Disagree
  - d. Strongly Agree
  - e. Agree
5. In my opinion, the term ‘ghetto’ is a racist term:
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree or Disagree
  - d. Strongly Agree

- e. Agree
6. In my opinion, the term 'ghetto' can be used in many different ways:
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree or Disagree
  - d. Strongly Agree
  - e. Agree
7. The term 'ghetto' is most often used to describe minorities:
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree or Disagree
  - d. Strongly Agree
  - e. Agree
8. I would feel comfortable living in a neighborhood described as being 'ghetto':
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree or Disagree
  - d. Strongly Agree
  - e. Agree
9. I would feel comfortable sending my child to a school described as being 'ghetto':
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree or Disagree
  - d. Strongly Agree
  - e. Agree
10. I would be comfortable befriending someone described as being 'ghetto':
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree

- c. Neither Agree or Disagree
- d. Strongly Agree
- e. Agree

## **APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- What do you define as 'ghetto' or as being 'ghetto'?
- Do you or have you ever used the term 'ghetto'? If yes, how so?
- In your opinion, how does American society define the term 'ghetto'?
- How do you feel about the usage of the term 'ghetto'?
- Have you ever been called ghetto? If so, what was your reaction?
- In your opinion is the term 'ghetto' associated with race? If not race, what do you view the term being associated more so with?
- Does it offend you if someone uses the term 'ghetto'? Why or why not?
- Can you think of any other terms that can be used interchangeably with the term "ghetto"? What are they? How are they used?