Compare how Google and [Brown Banner](#) handle human characteristics/attributes. What characteristics do they reduce in ways that lead to some sense of erasure?

Brown Banner abstracts much—indeed, the majority—of information about me as a person. The platform focuses almost exclusively on my identity as a student. While in a general capacity this would feel reductive, as Parrish highlights, the digitized representation of reality can only capture a narrow slice of the whole. Programmers, therefore, must carefully consider—remaining mindful and transparent—the choices they make regarding inclusion and omission. In the context of Brown Banner, the programmers navigated this challenge well. Some generally important personal information is omitted—such as my height or, say, my favourite colour—as it would serve no practical role. Conversely, data that might seem irrelevant in other contexts, such as my Banner ID, is included, as it is critical to fulfilling the platform's functionality.

However, even once it is determined which real-world information will be included, the programmer's task is not over—they must then decide how exactly each piece will be digitized. For example, in Brown Banner, religion is recorded as one of a series of discrete categories: Jewish, Lutheran, etc. Although there are many categories (some even distinguishing between different branches of the same religion) its discrete nature is fundamentally restrictive. There is an '*Other'* option, but this leads to the phenomenon of *othering*: a sociological term where individuals or groups are marginalized or categorized as "different" or "not fitting" within dominant norms. However, as Parrish discusses, the optimal approach to representation depends on the context. For instance, Brown University may use religious information for purposes like mailing list creation or statistical analysis—a task more difficult without predefined groupings.

Reflect on your response to the SRC component of the [Sortacle](#) assignment. How might Google or Banner mishandle some of the characteristics you had identified?

Both Google and Banner, simply by prescribing to strict first and last name categories violate many of the rules laid out in the Sortacle reading. Yet, Banner enforces the further restriction of a sixty-character cap. Which, while fairly generous, is still a restriction and someone could feel excluded by its presence. Although, as discussed in my Sortacle SRC, logically some character limit is necessary. Positively, Banner seemingly poses no restrictions on characters, accepting the assortment of random symbols and Chinese characters I tried—which means people with less common characters in their names won't feel excluded.

While no system can be perfect, Google's approach to gender categorization is more inclusive than many others, addressing the issue of *othering* and reducing the sense of erasure. Instead of offering only a set of discrete options, Google allows the creation of a totally custom category. This allows users to define themselves exactly as they wish, ensuring they are never grouped into a catch-all category.