

'I'm not racist, but that's funny': Registers of Whiteness in the blog-o-sphere

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Abstract

This masters' thesis is a case study using an antiracist methodology and critical discourse analysis to analyze a popular blog, 'Stuff White People Like' and asks the main research question: How is whiteness represented and understood in the satirical blog, 'Stuff White People Like'? Grounded in theories of representation, discourse, myth and racialization, the thesis looks at two posts, "#1 Coffee" and "#92 Book Deals" and their user comments to investigate the ways whiteness is defined, understood, produced and negotiated. The two blog posts reveal major moments within the blog, as the first outlined the framework and workings of the blog and the second post analyzed here revealed two moments. The first being the adoption, and negotiation of the framework of the blog as well as a moment where the blogger/author becomes more present within the blog itself and is therefore ascribed a social, political and racial context that the users take up and work through. The blog and the comments reveal important discussions of knowledge production strategies of racialization and racism in popular media. Specifically, these negotiations expose three major registers of whiteness that are continually enacted within the discourses of the blog and the comments. These registers encompass understandings of whiteness as biological superiority and heritage; defining whiteness as a performance of privilege; and whiteness as an enactment of dominance and oppression. Sites of antiracist educational pedagogy are also discussed within this study to reveal the importance of investigating everyday discourses and understandings of race for the future.

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Popular culture, ideologies and various forms of hegemony have powerful influence over how people come to ‘know’ and relate to their social and cultural world. The Internet has become the new cultural connecting place for many young people where they can construct personal identities, develop group identities and communities, as well as reconstruct social and racial differences that occur in the offline world (Chittenden, 2010; Li-Shia et al, 2008; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Taricani, 2007). Internet blogs have become significant sites for cultural knowledge production within the Internet (Wei, 2009) and for playing out identity politics. Identity politics and racialized membership in particular, require continual maintenance and negotiation within both the on- and offline world. Racialized membership and racialization involve a process by which essentialist and biologically deterministic elements are placed upon bodies in a primordial way; people in effect, *become raced* and consequently defined and understood in terms of their membership within a racial category (Ibrahim, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Snead, 1994). As Stanley (2011) claims, “solidarity among members of racialized groups is not natural. Solidarity needs to be invented, popularized, and policed” (p. 67).

Scholarly knowledge remains sparse regarding how race, racialization, and racialized identity formations figure into the communities and knowledge production of bloggers and Internet users. There is however, much scholarship on the relationship between the Internet, and blogs in particular, and identity formation (Chittenden, 2010; Mazur and Kozarian, 2009; Li-Shia, Yu-Jen, & Che-Hung, 2008; Taricani, 2007) as well as different theories of texts and society in general that relate to blogs and online communication communities. This means it is important to consider knowledge production in reference to a cultural artefact like a blog, as users and readers are active makers of knowledge, not simply receptacles for meaning, when interacting with a text (Henry & Tator, 2002). Therefore online communities

like blogs reveal real and significant ways that users are producers of knowledge. As such, these communities can have an important impact on the ways in which race continues to be used and understood as a source of identity and difference within popular culture.

However, scholarly blog and Internet usage literature dealing with topics of race, racialization, and racism specifically are concerned mostly with usages of certain racialized groups online (Jackson, Young et al., 2008; Jackson, Zhao et al., 2008) or specific extremist racist sites and their content (Billig, 2001; Gerstenfield, Grant, & Chiang, 2003; Glaser, Dixit, & Green, 2002). There is little literature on the knowledge production processes of race in online digital media or how such processes effect understandings of racialized membership (Steinfeldt et al., 2010; Brock, 2009; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 2008). Consequently, there is a need to bridge the gap between knowledge production and identity formation in online community forums, like blogs, and knowledge production of popular discourses on race and racism in this vast arena for antiracist education.

In order to engage how race and racialization function on the Internet and how knowledge is being produced of these social processes and categories, this study follows a critical case study format looking into a specific instance of racialization and online social media. The case of the satirical blog ‘Stuff White People Like’ (<http://www.stuffwhitepeoplelike.com>) is analyzed here, as its content offers a racialized framework where users interact with topics of race and particularly the performances of racialized whiteness¹. Specifically, this study investigates two major posts from the blog, the first post, “#1 Coffee” (January 18, 2008), as well as the post where the author announces

¹ According to APA standards, ‘white’ and ‘whiteness’ are considered proper nouns and should be capitalized. This study however, follows the framework of the blog and uses ‘white’ and its delineations as common nouns. The use of ‘white’ as a racialized proper noun within the user comments is rare and discussed further below.

that his blog content will be published in a book, “#92 Book Deals” (March 26, 2008). The first post acts as a grounding point for the analysis, where the blog’s racialized framework and major user trends emerge. The second post offers two distinct moments of analysis. The first reveals how the users adopt and further discussions of whiteness within the blog’s framework. The second moment involves a thread of comments where the author becomes more present within the blog and his identity as potentially being Jewish becomes the topic of discussion. This moment reveals important user discussions about the nature of Jewish identity, but also more specifically the intertwined and troubled relationship it has with questions of white identity and understanding.

This study uses an antiracist methodology in which the aims and goals of antiracism remain at the forefront of understanding and analysis of the case. This means uncovering and making problematic common-sense and everyday understandings of race found within the blog in order to promote new and critical understandings of how race works through a process of racialization within popular culture. Dei (2006) explains, “critical anti-racist discourse and practice must engage in a politics of denaturalizing of social categories. We know that the categories are themselves discursively constructed. Yet such realization does not delegitimize the categories we work with” (Dei, 2006, p. 17). Consequently, careful and critical understanding of race as a social category of understanding within the blog and the user comments were always taken into consideration within this study. Specifically, within this case study on racialized whiteness, there is a desire to “make problematic how ‘whiteness’ as a racial identity and social construction is taught, learned, experienced, and identified in certain forms of knowledge, values, and privileges” (Giroux, 1997, pp. 295-296). This means the project is in part to disrupt common-sense understandings of terms like “white” to create new, critical knowledge of how they make meanings in culture.

To follow this methodology and promote a critical and contextual understanding of whiteness within this case I asked the following main research question as well as several sub-questions to focus the research:

How is whiteness represented and understood in the satirical blog, ‘Stuff White People Like’?

What meanings are being attributed to whiteness?

What knowledge(s) of whiteness and race in general are being constructed or used in the blog and how is this knowledge being created?

Is whiteness represented as a fixed category and understood in similar ways for all users?

To answer these questions and engage the level of critical inquiry needed for antiracist work, critical discourse analysis was used, following the approach of Teun van Dijk, (1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2001) as well as theories of myth from Roland Barthes (1984/1972, 1977) and representation from Stuart Hall (2005, 1997).

Through its framework, the blog creates the borders of who can and cannot claim membership to the white group as defined by the terms of the blog entries and negotiated and ‘policed’ by blog users. This blog then creates and popularizes understanding(s) of racialized whiteness within this online social media that holds real and significant consequences for how people will use and reuse this knowledge in their offline worlds. These processes of knowledge production are revealed within the blog (2008) and the associated comments as the ways users interact, negotiate, and define whiteness in various contexts and levels of contest, which is exposed within their responses and reactions to the blog in general. Investigating how the users of this racialized blog negotiate definitions of whiteness demonstrates an articulation of the dynamics and registers of white membership. Such an

investigation also provides a more textured view of the socially constructed category of whiteness in terms of racial knowledge production in order to work for antiracism.

In the sections that follow a detailed literature review of the major concepts and theories that are vital to this work are defined and explained as well as a more in-depth breakdown of antiracist methodology employed within this work. Furthermore, a thorough description of the blog as the critical case is provided as well as the methods of data analysis following critical discourse analysis is outlined. This is followed by the main body of analysis of the two blog posts within the case and the user comments, which are separated into four main chapters. Each chapter analyzes and explains a specific moment and element of the blog to reveal the many interconnected ways different registers and knowledges of whiteness are produced and engaged within this critical case. Finally the conclusion section outlines the major points that the analysis revealed, answering the research questions above as well as explaining some of the possibilities this critical case opens for further research and understanding of differing productions of whiteness in online communities as well as the implications for antiracist education.

Literature Review

The following sections outline important theories and concepts that are vital to the analysis and interpretation of this study. Concepts of race, racism, and racialization reveal the complicated nature of identity formation and social classification. Theories of discourse, myth and representation colour these concepts and provide a framework for understanding how they can be deeply and critically understood as socially situated ideologies and processes. Furthermore, discussions of specific examples of how these theories function and how they are interrogated within scholarship are highlighted as well as a specific example of

the continued debate of such theories through a brief outline of Jewishness in relation to white identity politics and history as this example relates directly to the case study. Finally, there is an analysis of blogs and Internet social media as sites of knowledge production, as well as an explanation of how race figures into the study of blogs specifically as online social media outlets of popular culture.

What is ‘Race’?: Understanding ‘Race’/Race, Racism and Racialization

Race as a term, has a history that still holds powerful influence over how people interact with one another today. It began as a means of social classification when science was at the peak of attempting to understand human variation. It became a term of grouping people based on what were considered biologically essential characteristics and consequently allowed for the creation of a human race hierarchy (Goldberg, 1990). From this point, *race* as a term of categorization has undergone continual transformation to follow the outlines and ideologies of culture throughout history: “the shift in the meaning of ‘race’ has been one from unqualified physiognomic descriptor to a socio-political category evoked in the exercise of power relations” (Levine-Ransky, 2008, p. 51). Stuart Hall explains race to be a sort of ‘floating signifier,’ meaning it adapts and changes throughout history for the means of the powerful to describe and control those less powerful (Jhally, 2002). It is because of this floating signification that race as a term is continually in process of being articulated and re-understood. It is considered by most scholars of race to be “by no means self-evident, by no means ‘real’ in the positivist sense of that term” (Frankenberg, 2004, p. 72), though its affects on those it names are very real. It is for this reason that the term race is commonly within quotations, following Gilroy (1991) and many others, to refer to its constructed and its changing nature, though this is a political choice and does by no means speak for all scholars of race. With or without quotations, the term must always be understood as a ‘floating’ term,

and therefore contextually dependent (Ibrahim, 2003). *Race* is today more widely considered to be socially constructed; a term for social categorization based on assumed essential and shared notions of history, ancestry, culture and ethnicity. Ethnicity is often times used interchangeably with race, where ethnicity describes “cultural criteria” (Hall, 2000; Ibrahim, 2003). Ethnicity is related to race as racialized groups are often described and understood through the same cultural terms as ethnicity (Ibrahim, 2003). Because of this, identity formations and performances are often shifted and intertwined between, race, ethnicity and culture where definitions are used synonymously. Both terms however, employ a restrictive set of criteria for understanding and defining others that are seen to inhabit a racial/ethnic ‘group’ (Hall, 2000). Regardless of the term used, whether it is *race* or *ethnicity*, both terms create strong group associations that are restrictive and controlling to those they define. Levine-Ransky (2008) explains, “the hazard of the term [race] arises from its propensity to join physical, cultural and even social class difference wherein one set of meanings stands in for another” (p. 52). Consequently *race* relies continually on understandings of people based on assumed ‘natural’ characteristics (both cultural and biological) that come to define them in a primordial and eternal way. For the purposes of this study, *race* is used to define these restrictive groups, though in many cases, the performances and identities that might be described as ‘racial’ could also be ‘ethnic’. This use of a-historical and ‘natural’ understandings related to both terms is called *essentialism*.

Race and essentialism.

Understanding physical bodies and personal and social identities as part of race is largely determined by representations of race as an essentialist category: “Essentialism is taken to mean here the process by which particular groups come to be described in terms of fundamental, immutable characteristics” (Werbner, 1997 as cited in May, 1999, p. 34).

Essentialism describes categories and concepts as ‘natural,’ fixed, and inevitable (Fuss, 1990; Haslam, Rothchild & Ernst, 2002). Furthermore, as Morton, Honey and Postmes (2009) explain:

Essentialist beliefs fall into two underlying dimensions: natural kind beliefs (related to beliefs about the naturalness, immutability, and clearly defined nature of category membership) and reification (related to beliefs about the identity determining, informative and homogenous nature of social categories). Different groups can be essentialized along either or both of these dimensions (i.e. naturalized or reified) and both forms of essentialism are associated with category devaluation. (p. 36-37)

Consequently, defining race along essentialist categories is to fix elements of people and their identities within a category based on set pre-determined and believed to be a-temporal criteria. One of the most significant and detrimental uses of essentialist understanding is the link between biology and race (Goldberg, 1990).

This type of biologically or culturally determinate understanding of race is still very prevalent within perceptions of race as a social category today (Diamond, 1994; Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003; Smedley, 2007; Stanley, 2011). At its most basic, the biological grounding of *race* is visible in the discursive, linguistic foundation of racial categories, as ‘black’ and ‘white’ refer not to social attributes of people, but biological ones. Hall explains that ‘race’ must be understood as discursive in this way, not as a “biological fact” (Jhally, 2002). In the discursive manner, *race* takes on many of the characteristics of a language, as meaning becomes relational, it can never be fixed and is continually in the process of definition, redefinition and appropriation (Jhally, 2002). In a video lecture, (Jhally, 2002) Stuart Hall explains the discursive nature of race:

It is only when these differences [of identity] have been organized within language, within discourse, within systems of meaning, that the difference can be said to acquire meaning and become a factor in human culture and regulate conduct. That is the nature of what I'm calling the discursive concept of race.

For example, white as a race relies on the continued foundation of race being defined through science, through genetics, through visual cues of biology – the hair, skin and bone, to quote du Bois (2007/1903). What this means is the visual cue of “white skin” as part of whiteness is central to everyday definitions and understandings of the category and the social understandings of people who are *biologically* understood as white. Essentialism then becomes the defining element of race, which even discussions of human classification in anthropology make clear:

Classification of humans [as opposed to animals] is different ‘only’ in that it shapes our views of other peoples, fosters our subconscious differentiation between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ and is invoked to justify political and socioeconomic discrimination. On this basis, many anthropologists therefore argue that even if one could classify humans into races, one should not. (Diamond, 1994, p. 82)

Furthermore, the American Anthropological Association in their project *RACE: Are we so different?* gives three different understandings of *race*: race within history (which is political, social and scientific) as well as race in human variation (how it relates to DNA and global genetic variations) and finally race as it is understood as lived experience. These three registers for understanding race as a concept are inter-related and create the complex picture of the presence of “race” as a concept within the world. What their project makes clear however, is that race carries real consequences for understanding ourselves and others, and within science there are more variances *within* races as they are understood socially, than

between races (American Anthropological Association, 2011). Even with this admission and the power of this project, the continued presence of essentialized and fixed representation and categorization carry serious consequence for those it attempts to define. It is this type of discrimination based on a categorization of individuals following reductive and essentialist ideologies and histories that comes to be known as racisms.

Racism/s.

Racism or racisms involve the use of essentialist and biological understandings of people under the banner of race to limit, ‘other,’ or disenfranchise them. The power of ‘science’ in its attempts to explain and categorize human variation has continued to allow such biologically and physiologically essentialized understandings to endure in discourses of race (Jhally, 2002). Hall explains that this occurs because science provides a cultural and social “guarantee” of measurable and absolute difference among people that carry the same amount of authority as other systems of knowledge do (Jhally, 2002). Further, though overt assertions of biological hierarchy in relation to race are now considered ‘racist’ in the Western world, “the genetic, biological, and physiological definitions of race are alive and well in the common-sense discourse is for us all. The biological, physiological, or genetic definition, having been shown out the front door, tends to slide around the veranda and climb in the back through the window” (Jhally, 2002). Consequently, common-sense continually relies on these biological and physiological understandings of race as ‘science’ even if these understandings have been largely assumed to be absent in everyday discourse, continuing the assumptions as race being related to essentialized understandings of bodies.

Racisms also involve varying registers and have developed from overt forms of racial oppression to more subtle ones. Parker and Roberts (2005) argue, “while classical racism has subsided, everyday racism has remained alive. This type of racism can be characterized as

those mundane practices and events that are infused with varying degrees of racism” (p. 75). Racism is therefore not as *outwardly* prevalent in contemporary culture, but has developed to become more within the everyday practices, understandings, and knowledges people use towards others, which are contextually based. Furthermore, Henry and Tator (2002) explain that racist discourses in contemporary Western culture operate in a coexistence with democratic beliefs in justice and fairness, while simultaneously exhibiting negative beliefs and feelings about "minority groups and discrimination against them" which they term "democratic racism" (pp. 23-24). These conflicting and coexisting discourses of democracy and discrimination are produced and reproduced in different sites of learning, considered 'official sites' and 'casual sites':

Democratic racism as racist discourse begins in the families that nurture people; in the communities that help socialize them; in the schools and universities that educate them; in the media that communicate ideas and images to them; and in the popular culture that entertains them. People learn this discourse at the very sites where every other form of learning is provided. (p. 36)

Racisms are therefore not simply personal, involving personal prejudices, as has been assumed in the past (Dei, 2006; Hill, 2008; Litchenburg, 1998;), but are structural and contextual in nature. They rely on large social structures of domination and subordination and are continually enacted by all people, particularly the dominant (Bonnett, 2000; Dei, 2006; Leonardo, 2004). It is therefore vital to understand how such discourses of democratic racism are activated, favoured and perpetuated in all sites of learning, not simply those sites considered traditional or formal sites like institutions. The power of 'unofficial' sites of learning to influence and evolve these discourses must not be ignored. They are important sites of analysis for understanding how racisms continue to be enacted in contemporary

culture. It is within these sites and structures of domination that essentialist discourses get enacted onto bodies, making them racialized. This process of becoming raced is known as *racialization*.

Racialization.

The process of racialization relies on ideologies and essentialism to position people and categorize them into particular groups related to assumed common traits (whether they be physical or social) that are considered concrete and distinguishable from other groups (Dei, 2006; Levine-Ransky, 2008; Lewis, 2003; Murji & Solomos, 2005). As Murji and Solomos (2005) state in their book on the theories and practices of racialization, racialization acts as a means of understanding as well as ideological and cultural or political practices and process through which race is given significance. Culture and political practices, they assert, have “become the basis for the broader conception of racialization as expressing the ways in which social structures and ideologies become imbued with 'racial' meanings, so that social and political issues are conceived along racial lines” (Murji & Solomos, 2005, p. 11). However, how such practices actually engage race is not always clear as they can refer to processes of enacting ‘race’ in varying levels, degrees, and registers, whether it be very specific biological distinctions, processes of cultural differentiation or “a code in which the idea or language of race” is enacted (Murji & Solomos, 2005, p. 4). Further, as explained above between race and ethnicity, racialization is able to enact many different social and cultural divisions and ‘classifications’ to work on its behalf, these include “culture, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, ability, religion and, of course, race and skin colour as ways of distinguishing groups for differential and unequal treatment. This process of racialization allows dominant bodies to suppress and dominate others” (Dei, 2006, p. 27). What Dei’s (2006) description makes clear is the power infused within processes of racialization as they

involve a practice of classification that is largely enacted by the dominant upon the dominated.

Therefore in reality, the social categories of race are complex, interrelated and changing social constructions (Guaratnam, 2003, Stanfield, 1993). Race is not a single, fixed and deterministic category of identity and representation, but rather something that is enacted, placed upon bodies (Ibrahim, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Snead, 1994) and used to ensure social and political divisions through a process of racialization. Consequently scholarly analysis working with notions of race and racialization needs to pay particular attention to the social construction of race and its underlying power relations within subjugated knowledge as well as the way race works discursively, as a language of understanding people (Frankenberg, 2004; Guaratnam, 2003; Jhally, 2002; Stanfield, 1993). As racialization works within systems of domination and oppression to describe peoples within racial understandings, there is also a hierarchy within racialized understandings that provides some racialized groups more power than others. In the Western World, racialized whites are often afforded this dominant position.

‘The dominant race’: White and whiteness

Within definitions of race, and processes of racialization, a particularly interesting and elusive category is that of the white race. “White” was not initially considered a race, as it was the norm from which all ‘other races’ were understood. Whiteness consequently came to define itself largely through the negative of what it is not – it is *not the Other*. This definition is from a legacy of colonialism, where racial classification and understanding is rooted; where the colonizers, understood to be ‘white,’ were the sign post from which race was defined, therefore creating the discourse of white as *not* race, *not* Other (Chambers, 1997; Frankenberg, 2004; Goldberg, 1993; Newitz & Wray, 1997). Because of this ‘non-

race' beginning, whiteness has developed as a position of power, as the norm and at times invisible in relation to 'other races' as it is the center from which 'other' races are measured and defined (Frankenberg, 1993b). White does remain a race and therefore comes to have its own particular as well as common attributes of definitions of race (Frankenberg, 2004; Roman, 1993).

Frankenberg (2004) gives eight major points for defining whiteness where some of the points relate to larger understandings of racial identities: whiteness is socially constructed and relationally positioned, rooted in history. Like other concepts of race it is also a means of understanding selves, others and relationships. Also, like other races its boundaries change and are defined differently for different peoples within different times and places. What is particular to whiteness is that it is a location of structural advantage in societies that are structured hierarchically. It is also particularly a site of performances of cultural practices and identities that are most often defined as 'normative' "rather than specifically racial" (p. 76). Because of this, performances understood as "racial" for others are often shifted or "displaced" into other identity or social categories like culture or ethnicity. Whiteness' link to privilege is nested with other social points of advantage and disadvantage, which do not "erase or render irrelevant race privilege, but rather inflect and modify it" (Frankenberg, 2004, p. 76). Whiteness is therefore particular because it is defined through its advantages and its privileges (Fine, 2004; Frankenberg, 2004; McIntosh, 1990), not through its disadvantages or lack of norms, as whiteness does not only incur disadvantage to racialized others by being the 'norm' it also allows those defined as white to have and gain advantages because of their racialization. Furthermore, whiteness has developed in conjunction with concepts of race, especially since the civil rights movements of the 1960s, to see itself within a conflicted ideology. Winant (2004) explains that "from the late 1960s on, white identity

has been reinterpreted, rearticulated in a dualistic fashion: on the one hand egalitarian, on the other hand privileged; on the one hand individualistic and ‘color-blind,’ on the other hand ‘normalized’ and white” (Winant, 2004, p. 5). Winant’s (2004) characterization of white identity is an important one to understand how whiteness functions and is perpetuated as a racialized identity in popular culture. These dualistic characteristics of whiteness are important points of questioning and contention within the discourses of racialized popular culture.

The project of whiteness as a racial category in the North American context is therefore particularly interested in continuing to define itself through ideologies of fairness, egalitarian ideals and democratic understandings, but in order to do so, it engages in intricate policing of its definitions and relations of power in relation to racialized others. How these dualistic characteristics play out reveal important registers of whiteness that enact differing levels of dominance, privilege, and democratic ideologies.

This is also the case within understandings of ‘white’ itself. The example of the ‘white trash’ reveals the particularly powerful policing of white supremacy and power in contemporary culture as white trash is understood to be the ‘white other’ (Newitz & Wray, 1997). Furthermore, white trash “must be understood as an external and internal threat to whiteness” (Newitz & Wray, 1997, p. 169), as its devalued status within understandings of whiteness is in conflict with the continued understanding of whiteness as related to dominance and privilege. White trash and its othered status reveals the importance of understanding that whiteness itself is not a monolithic category, but is also imbedded within the hierarchies of social power where one can be ‘more white’ and therefore have more social capital within the category of whiteness based on other inter-related factors like economic status and performance. This reveals the delicate and inter-related nature of social

classification that relies on many factors to create an ideological understanding of the concept of 'white' in contemporary North American culture (Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2004). As Guininer and Torres (2004) explain, whiteness as a category is also measured in its comparison to blackness: Whiteness "in the United States is measured not just of the melanin content in one's skin but of one's social distance from black-ness" (Guininer & Torres, 2004, p. 412). What this means is that performances of whiteness by some people who can 'pass' as white allows them 'white' status, where the abstract (though understood as fixed and obvious) borders of 'white' and 'black' remain intact and racialized 'in-betweens' are required to perform their identities within these borders in a sort of third space of racial ambivalence and in-betweenness. This uncertainty is felt largely by Latinos (Guininer & Torres, 2004) but also by Jews (as the blog discussions make clear), which will be explained below (Brodkin, 2004; Goldstein, 2002; Rogoff 1997). Performances of 'race' through representation occur through a variety of means and at a variety of degrees. It is an understanding of these processes that I turn to in the next section.

Theories of Representation: Myth, Signs, and Discourse

Language is the means by which people are able to make their world intelligible and communicate meaning to others. Language is not however a simple concept as the processes of meaning-making and understanding communication are very complex. Many cultural studies theorists and linguists have come up with theories to explain how meaning happens through communication and language. On the linguistic side, the study of signs is one means of understanding language. The concept of language as *signs*, which is largely attributed to the Swiss linguist Saussure, involves understanding our world through signs where there is the physical object or form, the *signified*, and the abstract concept of the signified in language, the *signifier*. The interaction between the signifier and the signified creates the

sign. A sign is always arbitrarily understood however, as the signifier is a linguistic placeholder to *represent* the concept. For example, the form or signified of a “chair” is still the same form or physical object of furniture with four legs that a person sits on regardless of the relative language used, but the signifier changes. A “chair” and the French “chaise” are linguistically representing the same signified, but have different signifiers. Both *chair* and *chaise* equally represent the concept of the piece of furniture and are as arbitrary as calling the same signifier a *book*. The letters C-H-A-I-R are arbitrarily put together and are there to help people recall the concept of the piece of furniture. Therefore language is a collection of signs that allow people to communicate concepts and ideals to one another to create meaning. Saussure envisioned that his studies of ‘signs’ could be attributed to culture through a study he termed “semiology”, which became modern semiotics (Saussure, 1986, p. 15).

From semiotics to discourse and discursive formations.

Michel Foucault expanded the discussions of language and representation to look at how these linguistic practices were also infused with knowledge and power and how they were enacted historically and on bodies. Foucault’s notion of discourse relates the ideas of power and knowledge, as they are understood in language and provides the backbone for how cultural studies theorists understand the interconnected workings of language, knowledge, and power. Discourse is a more contextual concept than language, as it involves more the production of knowledge than simply meaning, it is “a cluster or formation of ideas, images, and practices that provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity, or institutional site in society” (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 26). Hall (1997), explains Foucault’s concept of discourse as “defin[ing] and produc[ing] the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be

meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others” (p. 44).

Foucault was specifically concerned with how discourse entered into culture and effected bodies in a historically contextualized, but real way (Foucault, 1984). Foucault (1980) describes discourses as connected ways of talking about the world that are contextual, as well as power infused. He explains that people cannot presume that actions, or writings, once out ‘in the world’ are not reflecting the world in which they are created. They are part of discourse, a knowledge-based way of talking about and understanding the world, and Foucault asserts that nothing meaningful exists outside of discourse. What this statement means is that people cannot use language to create meaning without also relying upon power-infused knowledge within that language to create meaning. Therefore reference to a subject cannot be made meaningful without a discourse in which it is referred. This relates to race, as writing and critically engaging in language about race is immediately steeped with knowledge that is always culturally mediated. *Race* in its very use brings forth a wealth of meanings and cannot exist outside of those meanings. This discursive power/knowledge relationship is critical to understanding some of the popular culture discourses of race that appear in the blog and allows for a critical engagement with that discourse as a site of knowledge and power. By writing about race, the blog is already creating knowledge of race that is picked up and interrogated by the blog users. Hall (1997) explains that discursive structures can be understood through what they include and what they omit: “just as a discourse ‘rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it ‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting, ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it” (p. 44).

Groupings of discourses, ways of talking (and not talking) about certain concepts or ideas create large discursive structures, which are often relatively fixed and highly historicized. Foucault understood these larger connections of discourses as discursive formations. Henry and Tator (2002) explain discursive formations as “what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular subject or site of social activity; what knowledge is considered useful, relevant and true in that context; and what sorts of persons or subjects embody its characteristics” (p. 26). Loaded concepts such as concepts of race, which carry many ways of speaking, understanding and acting within them, and are embodied by specific ideas and understandings of people(s), involve these large structures or groupings of discourses explained as discursive formations.

Analyzing discursive formations: myths.

One way of analyzing and understanding these discursive structures is through Roland Barthes theory of social myths. Barthes’ (1984/1972) theory of myths provides an understanding of how concepts such as race and racialization become produced, re-produced and naturalized within popular culture texts like blogs. Myths are considered for Barthes a second-order sign where signs in language become grouped together to form another larger sign, a global sign. The global sign then becomes the second order signifier where the signs that are part of it become the second order signifieds. In effect, the signs within the global sign come to present two levels of meaning, their original signifier and then when grouped with certain other signs, become part of the global sign. It is the global sign that Barthes comes to call a myth. Advertisements commonly employ myths to entice consumers. A popular example is any type of luxury advertising. For example, a perfume ad cannot usually sell the perfume directly, but employs many very culturally loaded signs in order to sell an idea of what the perfume can give the consumer: a woman dresses in a beautiful dress, with

flowing hair and a sly smile, delicate lighting and a small caption with a picture of the perfume bottle all work together as separate signs of the female form, woman's attire, sexual appeal, facial expression, beauty, and many others to create a global sign of womanly allure and desire. Each sign separately holds its own ideological significance, but put within a context where many signs are interrelated and working together, they create Barthes' second order or global sign to create the myth of the sexual woman. What ends up happening is the consumer understands the myth and appeals to the sense that the product, the perfume, furthers that myth: to be part of this myth of womanly allure and desire, a woman must buy this perfume.

Theories of myth then, reveal how language becomes reconceptualized to form not a direct link to meaning, but rather a more associative link, what Barthes sees as not a new reality, but a "certain knowledge of reality" (Barthes, 1984/1972, p. 119). Myth is about the linkage of understanding meanings in language to form new grouped understandings of that language that become naturalized. The naturalization process of myth strips the signs of the political and historical significance and makes them 'innocent,' natural and part of common-sense. Concepts of race and understandings of racialization are within this theory of myth as they rely on a "certain knowledge of reality" to be defined and are perpetually understood as *the* new reality because of the naturalized nature. Representation of race and hence racialization, then become not something of reality, but rather a myth of a reality that is culturally and contextually understood. Race is also understood as a common-sense category of difference and the negative and demeaning elements of race are mysteriously absent. It is as if the concept always existed and is articulated as a 'natural and innocent' means of understanding people. Using Barthes' theory of myth provides a vital link between how

ideologies of racialization are enacted and seen as natural in cultural understanding and language.

Modes of representation.

Stuart Hall (1997, 2005) also provides a theoretical basis for understanding what he terms as encoding and decoding practices of representations in language and myth. Representations have two distinct but interconnected modes of interpretation. Hall explains the first as connotation, a surface or more literal reading of the text. This type of reading allows for an investigation of what is actually being said, what the blog is actually saying on a literal level. The second layer of interpretation, denotation, is where literal readings are contextualized, where the myths are deconstructed, the modes of re-presenting are uncovered, and the discursive formations are visible; where and how the myth, the signs or linguistic representations it engenders, and the discourse in which it operates, gains meanings.

Hall's work takes an understanding of both Barthes and Foucault to create theories of representation as they relate to popular media. For Hall, representation is not simply a mirror or window into reality, but rather representation involves a re-presenting of myths within discourses in very specific ways (Hall, 1997). The understandings and meanings that come from media texts are not absolute; they are affected by the contexts of culture, history, as well as social and political power relations. Hall's theories ultimately focus on and draw attention to the way popular media have the ability to construct complex representative and discursive networks, which are directly related to how people form their understandings of reality. Hall stresses that race is part of "discursive systems because the interplay between the representation of racial difference, the writing of power, and the production of knowledge, is crucial to the way in which they are generated, and the way in which they

function” (Jhally, 2002). Hall’s work therefore provides another pillar to understanding how literal meanings and associative meanings are represented and understood within the blog and how this affects real understandings of whiteness practices and registers beyond the blog.

The theories of myth and representations uncovered by Barthes and Hall, as well as Foucault’s notions of the power/knowledge relationship of discourse, have allowed scholars to investigate other ways these representations can be understood and work within the world. Cultural studies scholars who are also interested in other intersecting areas of study such as sociology, psychology, humanities, and education have used these concepts to further the theoretical discussion of representation and how it works and functions in societies. Michael Billig (2005) uncovers the banal ways that news and popular media signal or ‘flag’ ideas of the nation, citizenship and nationhood. This flagging occurs through outwardly simple and discursively complex codes, where a linguistic term becomes metonymic for a much more complex idea, which is socially contextualized. Billig’s analysis allows for a deeper understanding of how everyday representations, or to use his term, “banal representations”, occur. They become codes for other, deeper associations to social and cultural ideologies that societies share. As an example, a simple maple leaf signals far more than an association to the maple tree in the Canadian context. It signals nationhood and citizenship, which are far more complex ideas than a deciduous tree. These small but powerful discursive moves are also used in the process of racialization where race becomes metonymic for an entire set of essentialized biological and cultural characteristics. Understanding this process and the weight of its symbolism is key to analyzing and working through how the users within the blog are reading and defining whiteness as well as constructing their own and other racialized meanings.

James Snead (1994) in his work within film studies also reveals how an interrogation of the discursive patterns and myths create naturalized notions related specifically to how African Americans are understood in film. Snead's analysis provides important information as to how race can be coded and represented within a specific media genre and how this representational coding occurs. The codes and methods of analysis Snead uncovers in his study will provide crucial insight into how race comes to be coded in other popular media genres such as the blog. Insight into those codes and their meanings, or their myths, is essential to understanding how race is 'flagged' or coded in everyday discourse. One of the main issues for antiracist scholars, with these flags, codes, or myths that are created, is that they are often essentialisms of a much more complex social signifier that must be carefully and critically engaged to fully grasp its power, performance, context and meaning in the social world from which it arises.

Though Barthes understands myth through concepts of signs that remain relatively a-historical, his analysis of how these signs come together to create, and I would argue, continually re-create a global sign, or myth that *appears* a-historical is significant. Billig's analyses of how the concept of nation and Snead's analysis of how blackness is continually reified through the concept of 'flagging' through signs are informative of the ways in which such concepts as 'nation' and 'race' come to seem a-historical and fixed, common-sense and 'natural'. It is this sense of myth that is employed within the study that follows in order to reveal the power of such seemingly a-historical and 'innocent' global signs within everyday discourses of whiteness. Whiteness as a global sign is not, however absolute. Although there is great effort to ensure the boundaries of whiteness as a historical 'fact', there are instances where this becomes disrupted and questioned. It is within these instances of troubling the foundation of social myths that their constructed nature is laid bare. The myth of whiteness

in the blog is disrupted by questions of Jewish identity in “#92 Book Deals” (clander, March 26, 2008), revealing the dynamics and performances involved in maintaining social myths. In order to contextualize these disruptions and fractures myth as it relates to whiteness, an explanation of the academic discussions of Jewishness in relation to white identity is provided below, where more in-depth analysis of how this is picked up and negotiated in the blog appears in the analysis section of Chapter 4.

Representation in action: the Jewish example.

Jewish identity provides a unique example of the ways race, racialization and other overlapping social categories can become shifting and problematic together with the power of common-sense understandings of the place and positioning of these categories. Discussions within and outside of scholarship continue to struggle with how to understand Jewishness in its relation to race, religion, ethnicity and culture. Kaplan (2003) explains that “while there may be no clear consensus as to what it means to be Jewish, in recent years authors have been virtually unanimous in rejecting the idea that the Jews are a race” (p. 79). Even with this sense of understanding Jewishness as ‘not a race’ the history of Jewish identity in relation to race has made the affects of racialized classification of Jewish identity very real for many people. There is a discursive formation of Jews being positioned as a hybrid of white and black, but still separate from either race. “White Jews” for example, were linked to “an honest businessman or a Jewish friend in contrast to a ‘black’ Jew, who was not to be trusted” (Rogoff, 1997, p. 217, quotations in original). Kaplan (2003) deals with this history by stating that though “Jews may not be a race in the biological sense, they often behave and are treated as a ‘race’ in the socio-historical sense” (p. 79, quotations in original). Kaplan’s own understanding of the biological foundations of other races is troubling to see, though his point about Jewishness as more rooted within a tradition of

culture rather than biology is of significance here. Levine-Ransky (2008) furthers this point by articulating that though Jews may not be a race in the biological sense, the affects of racialized 'othering' and difference were and are very real: "While exceptions exist among Jewish individuals who successfully integrated, Jewish difference remained difference" within larger social structures of identity (pp. 55-56). Therefore the affects of the racialization of Jewishness, though not linked as heavily to biology as other racialized categories, still carry the negative attributions of difference both within and outside of the racialized group (Goldstein, 2002; Kaplan, 2003; Rogoff, 1997).

Consequently Jewishness as an identity category occupies multiple and at times conflicting positions. Its very example reveals the fluid nature of representation and identity in our modern world. It is important to understand the power of attribution and performance to identity classification both for outward personal identity formation and more importantly for the categories that are imposed upon people because of performance. Regardless of whether Jewishness is considered a culture, ethnicity, race, religion or any combination thereof, it is vital to understand the affects of these attributions and performances for people who are categorized by them. In this paper I recognize the racialization of Jewishness, not because I believe it to be definitively a race in comparison to other identity categories like those listed above, but because of the ways its inscription is imposed and used to understand people in racialized terms with real and significant affects for both those being categorized and those doing the categorizing. The goal within this study is not to determine where the social concept of Jewishness fits within these pre-existing, a-historical and common-sensical categories, but rather to expose how these categories attempt to rely on essentialized understandings and performances in an attempt to fix Jewishness within or outside of their boundaries.

Blogs as Cultural Sites

Scholars who focus on the social and psychological implications of the Internet assert its importance as a site of “everyday life” and a norm within American society (Brock, 2009; Nakamura, 2008; Wei, 2009). Nakamura (2008) traces out the evolution of how the Internet has moved from a site for technological pioneers, to a place of everyday interactions, creating a new and intersecting dynamic called *cyberculture*. Nakamura (2008) further explores the implications of this evolution on the images and representations of race and racialized issues on the Internet. Though her book does not explicitly mention blogs, she focuses more broadly on the trends and visual rhetoric of race that reveals the Internet’s wide and varied representations of race and racialization. Nakamura also emphasizes the importance of interrogating and understanding race in cyberculture and online spaces as they are directly influenced by and effect the offline world and subject positions of its users.

Scholarship on blogs and blogging specifically varies widely, but continues to be sparse. Much of the scholarship remains fragmented between investigating identity formations within blogs, (Chittenden, 2009; Mazur & Kozarian, 2009; Li-Shia, Yu-Jen, & Che-Hung, 2008; Taricani, 2007) as well as different theories of texts and society as they may relate to blogs and online communication communities in general (see Carrington, 2009 for an analysis of how background effects blog and personal web page content; see Luders et al., 2010, for an analysis of the changing genres within online personal media including blogs; see Cenite, Detendber, Koh, Lim, & Soon, 2009, for an analysis of the ethical debates surrounding blogger responsibilities). The community identity of the blogosphere, for example, is an integral part of understanding how and why blogs are written; their social dynamics as well as how responses are understood in that community (Taricani, 2007).

Lu Wei (2009) explains how blogs have become a new and emerging site of knowledge production. Wei's article explores the power of the blog to shape the production of knowledge for its users within two types of blog formats: the filter blog (a blog which is predominantly politically motivated and 'filters' news information to its readers) and personal journals (blogs which deal primarily with the daily events and feelings of the blogger) where the blog for this study would be defined as a variation of a filter blog. Wei's article reveals the importance of understanding the evolving influences of online genres as cultural sites and knowledge producers, but does not investigate what types of knowledge are being produced. This study addresses the specific ways racialized knowledge is produced with the blog as Wei's (2009) article confirms that this knowledge is not simply personal opinion, but rather a significant site of social knowledge production for its users.

Blogs and race.

Scholarly blog and internet usage literature that focuses on race and racialization is largely centered around extremist racist hate and racial prejudice (Gerstenfield, Grant, & Chiang, 2003; Glaser, Dixit, & Green, 2002; Billig, 2001) or the usages of the Internet and community sites, such as blogs, by different racialized and ethnically similar peoples (Jackson, Yong et al., 2009; Jackson, Zhou et al., 2008), where little attention is given to how race is actually constructed and discursively produced in blogs or online community forums (Steinfeldt et al., 2010; Brock, 2009; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Subrahmanyam & Greenfield (2008) follow the trends of adolescent readership and usage on the Internet, including blogs, reveal that their primary tool is to reinforce relationships with friends and romantic partners. Though the authors mention how race and especially conceptions of whiteness are used as a social marker in the online world and how adolescents are frequently exposed to racialization and even racial slurs and negative comments while online, the study

does not attempt to explain how these instances of racism are effecting the community ties and knowledges of race that users are being exposed to and internalizing. This study does not deny the troubling rise of racist hate sites and communications online, but only makes reference to extreme cases of racialized violence and hatred that these online teens encounter.

Michael Billig (2001) examines multiple Ku Klux Klan (KKK) websites to interrogate the ways they enforce the discourses of race and racism specifically within their joke pages. His analysis reveals that critical engagement is vital to understanding the manifestations of race and how they are produced and exposed in online community environments. Billig's analysis also provides a framework for examining racialized discourse on the Internet. Billig's research within this article is kept to the analysis of overtly racist jokes and comments in self-proclaimed racist websites affiliated with the KKK, but it does not address the online community these sites create and how this effects the discursive nature of the site. This article makes reference to the extremist hate sites and discourses as the main source of worry. It is however, the "everyday racist" essentialism and just under the surface racializations that are of particular concern *because* they are so often overlooked as sites of racialized discrimination (Leonardo, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Litchenberg, 1998).

Andre Brock's (2009) analysis of racial formations on the Internet provides one of the closest studies to the ways of analyzing and interrogating everyday racialization in blogs or online texts. His study follows the blog *Freakonomics* where users blog and comment on the critically acclaimed television series *The Wire*. Brock uses the theory of racial formations² to interrogate the blog's discussions of race in terms of identity, interaction, media, and geography. This analysis does reveal the ways racial categories of identity can be

² See Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formations in the United States*. Routledge: New York.

created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed, but fails to investigate the ways these categories are essentialized and maintained by a metalanguage (Barthes, 1984/1972) or a larger power-infused system of racialized discourse (Foucault, 1980; Leonardo, 2004). It also fails to mention what users and blog writers learn about race and racialization from this process of racial formation. Brock's analysis is however, an important resource for the incorporation of a race-based theoretical framework into the interrogation of web-based cultural media and texts.

Methodology

This study is framed through multiple, and inter-related levels of analysis. The methodology for this project uses aims and goals of antiracism as a lens for the analysis of a specific critical case, the blog "Stuff White People Like" (2008). The critical case is part of case study research where a very specific and controlled unit of analysis, which directly pertains to the subject of study, is critically analyzed (Creswell, 2007). Therefore the critical case is investigated within the lens of antiracist methodology. In order to do this, a deeply textured, critical and in-depth analysis strategy must be in place to flesh out the ways racism and racialization function within the critical case and expose these instances in order to create a new knowledge and critical understanding of the power of such categorization for the people it affects. For this purpose, critical discourse analysis was used as a method of interrogating the critical case to work within the antiracist methodology. An explanation of antiracism as a methodological framework as well as the analysis strategies of the case and a description of the parameters of the case is discussed in the sections that follow.

Antiracism as Methodology

Antiracism has developed as anti-essentialist movements that work to expose and breakdown essentialist ideas of race on a social and cultural level with all people, looking

both at those that they disenfranchise and those who inadvertently perform the powers of naming and disenfranchisement (Apple, 1997; Bonnett, 2000; hooks, 2003; Leonardo, 2004; McIntosh, 1990; Ridley, 2005). Antiracism, as Bonnett (2000) aptly explains, “implies the ability to identify a phenomenon – racism – and do something about it” (p. 4). It aims to critically examine and break down essentialist ideologies of race and promote critical understanding of identities marked and defined by race and the process of racialization (Bonnett, 2000; Stanley, 2011).

From this theoretical lens the role of the research and researcher is to uncover and dismantle everyday essentialist ideologies of race, which occur through racialization, by paying particular attention to the discourses, myths, power relations, and systemic underpinnings of racialization (Leonardo, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Ibrahim, 1999; Litchenberg, 1998; McIntosh, 1990; Stanley, 2011). As Stanley (2011) explains, “if racism racialize, anti-racisms promote deracialized inclusions. If racism has negative consequences, anti-racisms try to mitigate these consequences” (p. 14). For this study specifically, an important aspect of interrogating these cultural texts from an antiracism perspective is to pay particular attention to the racializing process within subject positions. This involves the racialized subject positions of the researcher, as well as the racialized subject positions being re-enforced, constructed, included and excluded within the texts in order to expose these seemingly natural racialized subject positions in a critical way (Apple 1997; Creswell, 2007; Garner, 2007; Guaratnam, 2003; Ridley, 2005; Stanfield, 1993). Antiracist scholarship also urges researchers within this theoretical perspective to tread critically and carefully through racialized issues as to not reassert the dominance and centrality of whiteness as well as the power of racialized exclusions that antiracism attempts to disrupt (Garner, 2007; Clark & O’Donnell, 1999; Stanley, 2011; Tatum, 1999; Thompson, 1999). As McDonald (2006)

states, “the central objective of all anti-racist qualitative research is to foster ways to achieve social justice, equity, and fairness. Research processes must attempt to eschew further domination and the rationalization of prejudices in their research findings” (p. 114).

Antiracism as a methodological framework then, works to seek out the ways racialization functions, particularly in discourse, in order to reveal how such processes affect the people they describe. It is the continued goal of this methodology to trouble common-sense understandings and knowledges of race, to break down and expose essentialist logic to create a space for new knowledges of the a/effects of racialization. In order to do so, it was important to find a specific and concrete place where such processes of racialization take place. Of particular importance here was the everyday racializations within popular culture. Therefore a critical case study allowed for a bounded case of a particular subject area, race, in order for such an analysis and investigation to follow this methodology.

Critical Case Study

This particular study focuses on the critical case of a blog dealing with racialized subject matter and racialized users (those who are identified as a certain race, either through self identification or the identification by others) (Lewis, 2003). The blog was purposefully chosen as starting point for the critical case, as it is a modern cultural phenomenon dealing specifically with racialized subject matter, allowing for analysis of the discourses of race and how the users come to speak about and learn about whiteness, race, and racialization in a popular cultural forum. The critical case therefore fits within the antiracist methodology as the unit for analysis.

Blogs are laid out with the general format of journal-like entries being posted in reverse chronological order on public Internet social networking sites with user responses to the blog posts at the bottom (Mazur & Kozarian, 2009). Blogs therefore have two major

parts: the blog posts themselves and the user comments that accompany them. The blog for this case study is entitled “Stuff White People Like” [SWPL], which is explained in the in-depth description of the case below.

Specifically this study is bound to an investigation of two particular posts within the blog and their respective comments. The first post examined within the case study is the very first post of the blog, “#1 Coffee” which was posted January 18, 2008. The second post investigated and analyzed here is where the blogger relates that he has received his first book contract (post “#92 Book deals”) for his work and it is at this moment in the blog posts that the blog becomes authored. This occurs as it is the first instance where users come to see the blogger as an ‘author’ of the blog and also visually see him in the photograph that accompanies the text of the blog post. In the previous posts, the nature and framing of this blog sets up the author/blogger as relatively distanced and anonymous, however it is within this post and its comments that the users fix the authority of meaning back into the blogger and relocates his racialized identity as the main topic of focus and dispute for their interpretations of this post and the entire blog. It is this post in particular and its comments that expose the ways in which racialization is inscribed and fixed as well as where the users learn to see the author’s race as determining and framing their understanding and their meanings of the blog and of race more broadly.

The study is also further defined and bounded by date. A blog is continually updated and the conversations and discussions that occur in the user-responses section of the blog are never finished, but are continually being added to and updated. In order to properly define the boundaries of the case of the blog, only the first two months’ worth of comments after each blog posting were used as part of the case study.

In order to properly define and control the case, as the online environment is one of continuous change, screen shots of the blog posts were taken as they appeared on May 13, 2011, the day after the paper's proposal acceptance (see *Figure 1* on p. 41 of this text for a screen shot example). Screen shots of the comments associated with each blog post were also taken to create a digital snapshot of how the blog actually appeared at the beginning of analysis in order to preserve the blog in a it appeared and control for changes that may occur within the blog while analysis was being carried out.

Analysis Strategies

This critical case is largely informed by document analysis, as the case is an assessment of how the blog genre in popular culture, and this case specifically, can invoke the continued discourses of racialized inequality. The study used critical discourse analysis [CDA] as a mode of interrogating the critical case, largely following the work of Teun A. van Dijk, (1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2001). This type of analysis is deeply rooted in cultural studies, and looks to the theories of myth (Bathes, 1972), cultural representation and discourse (Foucault, 1980, 1984; Hall, 1997, 2005). CDA, according to Van Dijk (1993b), is also largely informed by equality studies and feminist studies. Consequently it is a good fit for an investigation into the representation and discursive practices in a cultural context such as this study. Furthermore, this type of analysis nestles within the larger aims of antiracism, as according to van Dijk (1995) CDA attempts to:

Uncover, reveal, or disclose what is implicit, hidden or otherwise not immediately obvious in relations of discursively enacted dominance or their underlying ideologies. That is, CDA specifically focuses on the strategies of manipulation, legitimation, the manufacture of consent and other discursive ways to influence the minds (and indirectly the actions) of people in the interest of the powerful. (p. 18)

In order to achieve this, CDA involves a careful interrogation of both the macro and micro levels of discourse and how power is infused into discourse to create racialized difference and understanding. The macro level deals with the “contextual, interactional, organizational and global forms of discourse control” whereas the micro discourse level deals with “intonation, lexical or syntactic style, rhetorical figures, local semantic structures, turn-taking strategies, politeness phenomena, and so on” (van Dijk, 1993b, p. 261). The blog posts were first analyzed in this manner, paying attention to both macro and micro levels of discourse.

As the blog is a multi-media genre, the photographs that accompany the blog posts were also examined. Photographs carry their own types of discourse and require different types of analysis. Analysis of the photographs was largely informed by Barthes’ (1977) discussions of the signs and language of photographs. Within Barthes (1977) analysis there are also two levels of meaning and understanding – the denoted and connoted meaning, which are similar to Van Dijk’s (1993b) macro and micro levels in that the denoted meanings look to the very surface, factual understanding and the connoted meaning involves more of the subtle uses of finding the meanings within the semiotic signs of the discourse. Connotation concerns “fragments of an ideology ... These signified have very close communication with culture, knowledge, history and it is through them, so to speak, that the environmental world [of the culture] invades the system [of representation]” (Barthes, 1967, as quoted in Hall, 1997, p. 39). This type of two-tier analysis was also helpful with the analysis of the text as both Barthes (1977) and van Dijk’s understanding of the multiple structures of discourse (whether it be talk, text or photograph) were employed to grasp the more critical and inferred meanings within all elements of the blog. What these analytical structures allow in this investigation is an interrogation and understanding of the interconnected and refined ways discourse and dominance function in everyday sites.

Another layer of analysis was also used within this specific case as the satirical framing of the blog entries and the way this framing affects the user comments cannot be ignored. Understanding the dynamics of how satire and humour play into the blog and its comments was informed by theories of humour and satire (Archakis & Tsakona, 2005; Davidson, 1987; Ferguson & Ford, 2008; Fine & De Soucey, 2005; Lockyer & Pickering, 2008) especially by the work of Michael Billig (2001; 2005). Billig's work provides a vital frame for understanding the social dynamics of humour and ridicule and how they function within the discourses of the blog and comments. Using this framework, along with CDA textures the analysis to account for the satirical elements within the blog and its users' comments.

Analysis Process

The analysis involved a careful and cyclical study of the blog entries and their discursive acts, marking specific quotations and noting in the margins some of these "less conscious" elements of discursive dominance and comparing them with the discursive acts within the blog responses by users. Specifically, the analysis encompassed first understanding the factual meanings of the blog entry, and then a deeper, more contextualized analysis following van Dijk's model, watching for how power is used and inferred, how racialized whiteness is positioned, how the reader and the author/blogger are positioned within the text and the blog entry on a whole as well as the assumptions and ideologies the blog is relying on to make meaning. By flagging these moments, analysis of what these moments can mean for knowledge production of race and racism becomes clearer.

Analysis of the user comments associated with each blog entry followed in order to see what users were saying in regards to the post and also how they were saying it. Themes and subject grouping of the user comments allowed me to fixate on the overarching

discursive patterns of the blog's comments in order to focus on the most striking as well as the most repeated thematic and subject specific discursive structures and occurrences. This type of grouping further allowed for comparisons between the blog entry and their comments as well as between the two different blog entries and their associative comments on a whole. These comparative and thematic groupings revealed a deep and textured description of the major discursive practices within the blog and how they come to be reflected and troubled within the user comments as well as what knowledges, ideologies and registers of whiteness are being both promoted and silenced within the blog.

I also analyzed the banner title head of the blog (see *Figure 1* on p. 41 of this text) as it appeared on every page of the blog posts and therefore became part of the 'experience' of each entry for a user. I use the term 'experience' here to express the overall feel and atmosphere of each post and how a user might navigate the site. It was also important to pay attention to how the blog and the user comments were *intended* to be read and how some users did or did not follow the intention of the blogger or of other user comments. Though intention is very different than the affect of reading and meaning making, analyzing and understanding what Hall (2005) terms the preferred reading of the blog allowed for a more textured understanding of the way the blog employed ideologies and common-sense logic to forward its ideas and understanding of whiteness. Moments where users followed the preferred reading became just as significant as sites of resistance to these preferred readings where users employed mostly a negotiated reading of the blog. These readings reveal the level of identification or "symmetry/asymmetry" between the blog, and the users (Hall, 2005, p. 119) as well as the registers of racialized whiteness within popular culture.

The process of this analysis was always informed by the major goals of antiracism that strive to uncover and flesh out essentialized understandings of race and how they work

within the process of racialization. For this reason CDA was a vital component in these goals as Van Dijk makes it clear (1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2001) that CDA is as much practice as a means of investigation and analysis. The practice of CDA involves using the analysis to provide a means of giving power to those who are disenfranchised by elite discourses through the “development of counter-power and counter-ideologies in practices of challenge and resistance” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18).

The Case: ‘Stuff White People Like’

The blog, “Stuff White People Like” (2008) written by a blogger who calls himself “clander” uses separate pages for each entry and archived discussion from users dating back to its first entry in January of 2008. The blog is hosted by wordpress.com, which allows anyone to post replies to public blogs. In this host framework, the blogger has control over the content and manner in which the blog is presented. This includes privacy rights as well as the visual and textual layout and content of the blog. Wordpress.com also provides thematic templates for the content of the webpages (wordpress.com, n.d., “Features”). To date, the blog has received over 80 million hits and has anywhere from several hundred to several thousand comments per posting. The popularity of the blog has led the author of the blog to receive two book contracts with Random House based on the blog’s material. Below (Figure 1) offers a screen shot of the blog’s interface in the “About” section (clander, 2008, January 18).

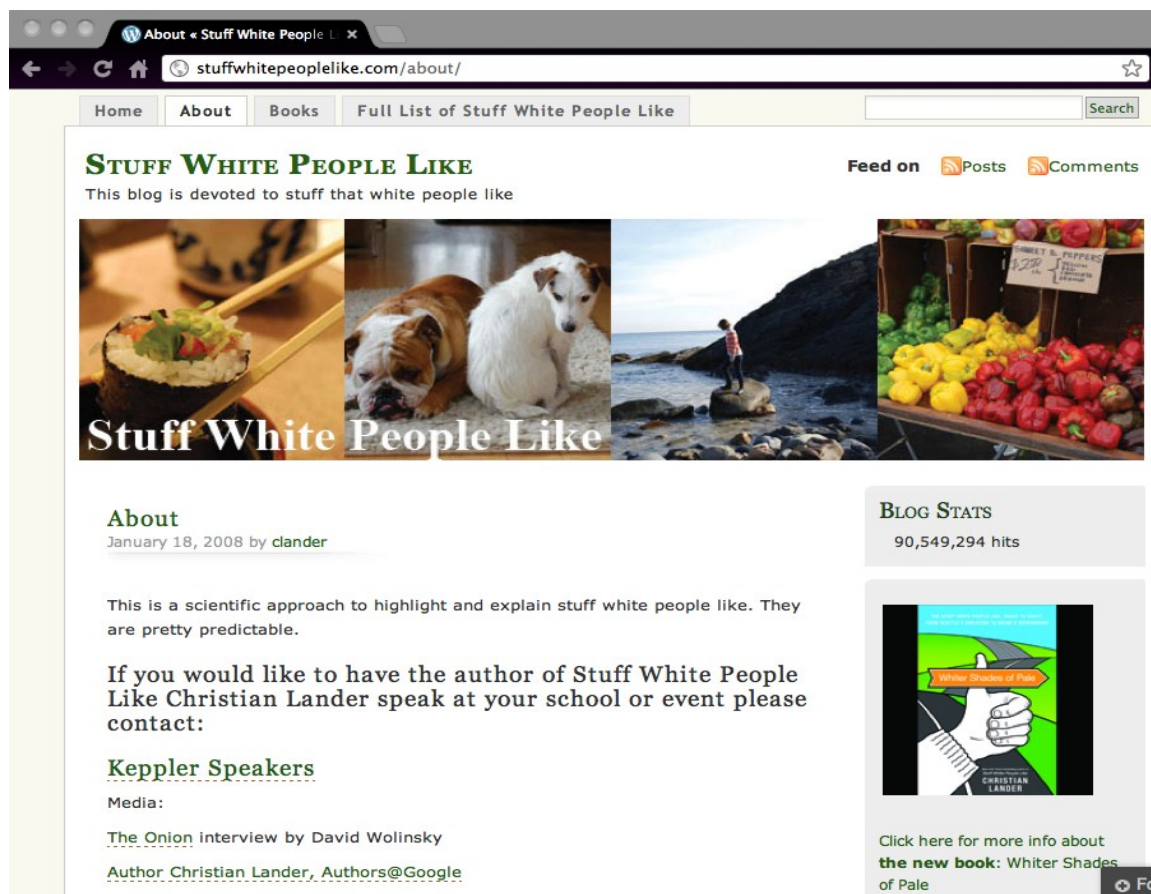


Figure 1. Screen shot of "Stuff White People Like" blog, "About" section. clander, (2008, January 18). About [web log post]. Retrieved from <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/about/>

The blog is framed as a guidebook to ‘non-whites’ giving them the ‘insider secrets’ on so called ‘white people’ in order for them to procure ‘white friends’ (Wolinsky & Lander, 2008). The blog has a title head at the top of each post page with the name of the blog within a four-picture banner. There are sections marked at the top readings (from right to left): “Home”, “About”, “Books”, and “Full list of stuff white people like”. As the entries appear in reverse chronological order, following the typical blog format, the most recent post appears first, and scrolling down the page reveals older posts. Using the menu “Full list of stuff white people like” a user could also navigate the entire list and choose to look at specific entries. Each entry is numbered as a list of specific characteristics of people named as ‘white’ to which users can comment on each posting or other user comments. Comments

appear at the bottom, once again in reverse chronological order and are threaded in a manner that allows visitors to the blog to see who is commenting on what and who has commented before. Conversations can occur as individual posts or as part of an online ‘conversation’ where user comments are linked together through a threaded system where users can post comments not on the blog post itself, but rather on the comments of other users, creating the digital discussion forum. The blog interface allows users to see the chain of the conversation, making an analysis of the conversations (who is responding to whom and when they responded) quite a straightforward process (see Appendix B for an example of how the threaded comments appear in the blog). The framing of the blog entry through its decisions to create an identity of racialized whiteness, and its satirical tone is echoed and taken up within the comments and conversations surrounding the entries. Discussions of racialized identity, race, as well as the place and power of humour and satire to inform these subjects colour the user comments. The comments provide direct evidence of how knowledge of race, whiteness, racialized identity membership, and racism are produced, reproduced, and negotiated in this blog and more broadly the power of popular media to spur critical discussions of these important topics.

Setting the Frame: The Blog and its Framing

The blog’s strategic and distinctive framing allows for interesting discussions surrounding how knowledge is replicated and produced online. Using a listing structure known to other comedy forums such as CBS’ Late Night with David Letterman’s “Top Ten” (CBS Interactive, 2010), the blog is able to satirically and unapologetically list aspects of racialized whiteness that are incurred because of the legacy of white privilege and dominance (McIntosh, 1990) and in doing so creates the outline for white racialized membership. As stated above, racialization is about the inscription of social and cultural attributes and

meanings onto bodies that come to “belong to those bodies in a primordial or natural way” (Lewis, 2003, p. 287). Therefore there is an immediate socially understood and unquestioned assumption that there can and should be a classification or grouping of people by skin colour, which marks them with certain attributes that are somehow inscribed on their identities *because* of the colour of their skin or other naturalized markers of race. It is true that many people with differing skin colours are inscribed with a pre-established history and cultural and political identity into which they must somehow fit (Ibrahim, 1999). What the blog assumes however, is that this is a legitimate and acceptable means of social classification.

It is important to note that the framing of the blog becomes central to how users understand and relate to the racialization of whiteness as it becomes visible and knowable. As Giroux (1997) explains with reference to the film *Suture* (Soderbergh, McGehee, & Siegel, 1994), “the film’s attempt to develop a representational politics certainly forces the viewer to demystify and debunk ‘whiteness’ as invisible, outside the modalities of power and identity, but it does nothing to develop a power-strategic politics that refuses to accept ‘whiteness’ as a racial category that has only one purpose, which is closely tied to, if not defined by, shifting narratives of domination and oppression” (p. 306). Like *Suture*, the blog does engage the racialized register of whiteness that is visible and knowable and forces users to confront it. It does not, however, offer a means of understanding whiteness outside of its construction and performance of the norm and as politically, culturally, and socially superior in reference to racialized ‘Others’. A discursive analysis of the blog and its posts specifically reveals how the definitions of whiteness the blog prompts is one of racialized performance, which is unquestioningly and ‘naturally’, as Giroux (1997) suggest of *Suture*, linked to “narratives of domination and oppression” (p. 306).

Who Are the Bloggers and the Users?

The majority of people in the United States that are regularly engaged on the Internet, and specifically within the ‘blogosphere’ are under thirty (Taricani, 2007). In The Pew Internet Report on *Social Media and Young Adults* by Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr (2010), analysis indicates that the prevalence of blogging has remained relatively stable since 2005 with “roughly one in ten online adults maintain[ing] a personal online journal or blog”. The trends of who specifically is using social networking sites and blogging specifically are changing however. Although the number of bloggers and social networking users is still on the increase, there has been a decline in the number of teens and young adults blogging and an increase in the number of bloggers and social networking users among people 30-plus from 2005 to 2009 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickhur, 2010). Consequently, the demographics of the Internet blog users cannot be directly determined, but it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of the blog users are between the ages of 18-29 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickhur, 2010). This burgeoning demographic means that more people with social and cultural capital are participating in the creation and dissemination of knowledge on the Internet. This affects what and how knowledge in the offline world is being produced and circulated as well. A shift to a slightly older demographic participating in these online communities means that more knowledge from the people and generation that have more power to influence knowledge production in popular culture are the ones participating within these very sites to understand, circulate, and negotiate discourses of race. They are the very demographic with the power to change, inscribe, reinscribe or disrupt popular knowledge and meaning for the younger generation.

Taricani (2007) also asserts that much of the social aspects of blogs are about community building and that many blog users will relate more strongly to blogs that follow

closely with their own sense of identity. Therefore the users and readers of this particular blog would align themselves with the identity created by the blogger himself, and the other identities associated closely with this blog. With this in mind, Lenhart et al. (2010) also explained that their study results indicated that white adult users (or users the study racialized as such) are more frequently online than other racialized demographics and that “the frequency of an adult’s internet use is positively correlated with both educational attainment and household income” (“Part 1: Internet adoption and trends”, 2010). The outline of the ‘average’ Internet and blog user allows for an understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of the users and their respective comments as the social and cultural context from which both the blogger and the user commentators can originate cannot be ignored. Social and cultural background figure largely in understanding identities and ideologies of racialization and race in the representations the users enact within the blogs and comments. With the outlines of the blog as a case and the ‘average’ blog user/reader in place, I now turn to the analysis of the blog and the user comments as outlined above.

Analysis

The analysis section is divided into four main chapters, each of which builds on the other, uncovering a deeper and more specific level of examination of the blog entries and the user comments. Each chapter is used to further a critical understanding of the way racialization works in the blog and the larger definitions and registers of whiteness the blog reveals as a case in order to answer the research questions. The first chapter analyzes the blog’s main title banner to set up the overall framework of the blog and its relation to and definitions of race and specifically whiteness. The next chapter builds on that framework to analyze the first blog post “#1 Coffee” and the associative comments revealing a more textured understanding of the discursive formation of the blog as well as some of the ways

users initially approach the blog and its contents. The third chapter addresses a later post “#92 Book Deals” which offers deeper analysis of how the blog post’s discursive positioning in relation to the blog’s framework effect the knowledges users create regarding their understandings of race and whiteness. The final chapter keeps with the blog post ‘Book Deals’, but focuses more specifically on a moment where the blogger’s presence as the author of the blog becomes evident and the reactions of the users to this moment. These reactions reveal striking knowledges and common-sense understandings of race, whiteness, and Jewishness to expose the complexity of these social categories and the everyday discourses and negotiations of these categories online. These discourses and negotiations show how knowledge of ‘race’ and racism rely on ideologies of difference, biological determinism, in-member policing and performance to make meanings for users of these categories online, creating specific definitions of *white*, *race*, and *racism* alike. These definitions work as major registers of understanding whiteness that is contextual and relational, revealing how whiteness is related to dominance and privilege in popular ideologies of racialized identity.

Chapter One: Creating the ‘Whiteness’ Myth

‘White’ is best understood not as an empirical reality, but as a process of becoming, even as a way of ‘doing’ identity. (Levine-Ransky, 2008)

Much of the meaning for the users of the blog comes from the text of the blog postings themselves. The images that accompany the individual posts as well as the images that make up the blog pages in general add much connotative meaning and understanding to the text they accompany. Analyzing the photographs that are interspaced within the blog in reference to the denoted and connoted meanings and their larger context and placement in the blog, reveals how the photographs create a more textured ideological framework for

potential readings of the blog beyond the text. Within the blog, accounting for and understanding the potential connoted meanings and relationship of these meanings allows for a fuller understanding of the overarching ideology and cultural definition of whiteness and race that the blog produces.

What's in a name?: the title banner of 'Stuff White People Like.'

The words *Stuff White People Like* is written in a white overlay over four pictures making a banner for the top of each blog page. It is important to note the text of the banner itself is just as important as the images in influencing the meaning of the banner as a whole. As Barthes (1977) explains “formerly, the image illustrated the text (made it clearer); today, the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination” (p. 26). The word *white* is not in itself innocent. The use of the linguistic sign *white* in the blog signifies light skin. The banner signals the frame, or subject-position of the reader; this is about “white people” and what they “like”. This also signals that the blog is *not* about *non-white* people and what they might or might not like. It is the use of the term *white* and its racialized signification that frame or load potential meanings of the photographs that accompany it with a culture and context. This also reveals the first part of how race and whiteness become defined within the blog. There is an immediate biological component to definitions of white and race as well as a demarcation of boundaries of white through the biological associations of light skin.

The photographs themselves carry a weight of signification, of connoted meanings that is particular to their genre. A photograph, as opposed to a drawing or generated image, carries a special level of authenticity, of reality, that is accepted by viewers. Barthes (1977) describes the photograph as having two levels of meaning as there is in texts, a level of denotation – the image as reality itself – and then a level of connotation – where the levels of

production and cultural, sociological and psychological meaning are imposed into and upon the photograph. What is unique about the photograph is that the denoted meaning is initially far stronger than the connoted one: viewers see the photograph as a mirror of reality as if it represents reality itself. The photograph is taken as an “analogon”: “certainly the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it’s exactly this analogical perfection which, to common-sense, defines the photograph” (Barthes, 1977 p. 17). This means that common-sense finds the photograph to be a perfect reproduction, a reflection, of reality without any connoted codes that may infer meaning beyond the reproduction of reality itself. What becomes particular with this idea is that there *are* levels of connotation associated with photographs that Barthes (1977) refers to as the “photographic paradox,” which “can be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the ‘art’, or the treatment, or the ‘writing’, or the rhetoric, of the photograph)” (p. 19). Levels of connotation are analyzed and understood through a means of adding connoted meaning to reality itself and then further meaning through associated meanings – the genre, context and text that surround the photograph. Therefore understanding and analyzing the connoted meanings of photographs involves an analysis of the complete contextual positioning of the photograph as well as the elements within the photograph itself that carry their own connoted meaning. ‘Truth’ then, in the photograph becomes suspect, as the photograph cannot simply copy or reflect reality, but it comes to fall within the realm of representation, where it is part of a much larger matrix of understanding and meaning.

The blog, as a genre, contains a strong integration of text and image that is characteristic of the multimedia nature of the online world. Barthes (1977) articulates that the image itself carries an uncertainty or a fear of floating signifiers and modern images are

largely accompanied by text in order to remove this sense of floating, uncertain signification of meaning. The photograph itself operates within a matrix of meaning that is influenced and inextricably linked to the blog post, the website, the context of the website, the blogger, and the readers. Barthes (1977) regards this relationship as central to the sociological understanding of the dissemination and reception of an image text that he calls “a complex of concurrent messages” (p. 15).

The text in this sense acts as a stabilizer of meaning, an ideological compass or lens through which the signifiers of the image become more directly understood. More specifically, the connotations between photograph and text are linked by such considerations as the distance between the text and image. The relationship of text and image for a caption is significantly stronger as the text is inlaid or very close to the photograph and therefore “appears to duplicate the image, that is, to be included in its denotation” (p. 26). This is important for understanding the context(s) of *Stuff White People Like* as the banner head at the top of every page on the blog contains four photographs inlaid with the blog’s title (see *Figure 2*). The text therefore ‘duplicates’ the photographs and connoted meaning is understood as if they were one. The represented objects in the photographs (the piece of maki, the pair of dogs, the person walking on the beach, and the spread of farmer’s market vegetables) come to replicate or echo the caption of the banner – that is, these are *the stuff white people like*. This connoted link is created because of the proximity and placement of the text in relation to the photograph on the title banner – as if one signals the other.



Figure 2. Screen shot of the main title banner of 'Stuff White People Like' featuring four main images inlaid with the text of the blog's title. clander. (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.stuffwhitepeoplelike.com>

Each image within the blog's main banner signifies, or represents an idea of, what is, in the text, to be understood as whiteness. The first image shows a piece of maki (which is commonly referred to simply as 'sushi') held delicately between chopsticks over a plate with a cup in the background. The picture relates to the blog entry on ethnic food, where white people enjoy eating 'foreign food' in order to feel culturally adventurous and morally superior for 'trying new things' (Roseman, 2006). Sushi becomes equated with foreignness, as it is considered significant and 'out of the norm' to eat it, an 'ethnic adventure' to consume the foreign Other. This type of mentality suggests the prevalence of cultural tourism: 'white people' like to experience things like food, languages, customs and perhaps even religions from 'other cultures,' which are somehow distinct and separate from their sense of their own 'white culture' as a means of 'understanding' and 'experiencing' the *Other* (Hirose & Kei-Ho Pih, 2011; Santos, Belhassen, & Caton, 2008; Said, 2001/1978). It is a conflation of race into a restrictive and essentialized set of attributes as in this instance where sushi embodies both 'foreignness' and 'Japaneseness'. Food is a common means of exoticizing of the Other and therefore making them distinct and separate; a commodity to be consumed (Santos, Belhassen, & Caton, 2008). This is part of a much larger system of

controlling and understanding ‘Otherness’ through a culture of consumption (Hirose & Kei-Ho Pih, 2011; Said, 2001/1978). Partaking in this culture of consumption of the ‘Other’ creates the sense of knowing and understanding a pre-established grouping of people like “the Japanese” based on this restrictive set of attributes; sushi is Japanese and the Japanese *are* sushi. Through this ideology, whiteness becomes defined as the unspoken norm – there is no cultural tourism, or consumption of whiteness. White people experience *other* cultures and therefore define themselves as the benchmark from which *Others* are made foreign, controlled as separate from racialized whiteness, the norm, and understood in these terms. This image also speaks of the appropriation of ‘other’ cultural signs by whites. The piece of maki, originally made and part of Japanese cuisine is in this context, part of the definition of whiteness. The ‘Japaneseness’ of sushi has been literally stripped from its origins and seemingly unproblematically assigned to definitions of whiteness. This reveals the continued power and presence of colonial ideologies. Whiteness comes to be defined in this sense through a domination of the *Other* through appropriation of cultural signs. White people like, as related through this first photograph, the act of cultural tourism, the commodification of “otherness” and the unproblematic appropriation of such cultures.

The banner also shows two dogs sitting on a white carpet in a room with hardwood floors. The rhetoric of the image reveals the sense of privilege and leisure associated with having a pet. A pet (and the house, yard, time, and circumstance involved in having one in the first place) reveals the ideological association of whiteness to economic status, means, and social privilege (McIntosh, 1990; Leonardo, 2004) associated with the life required to own a pet. The dogs are posed together, sitting and laying unnaturally tranquil and close. The posing of the two dogs relates to the servitude and position a dog holds within a household. The dog represents family, privilege and act as an accessory of entertainment and enjoyment.

Dogs are a frivolous possession for the economically advantaged. The two breeds themselves are both from Britain originally – the English bulldog and the Jack Russell terrier. Both are therefore ‘pure breeds’ which also signifies wealth and stature – pure breeds with good ‘bloodlines’ are more expensive than mixed breeds. The whiteness defined in this photograph relates to economic, and social advantage as well as the importance of heritage and bloodlines. This further shows the importance of a legacy of privilege in definitions and understandings of whiteness. White people like, in this sense, reminding themselves of both their heritage and their social and economic capital through a symbolic show like having a pure bred dog as a pet.

The third image depicts a person walking casually on a calm rocky shore. This photograph hints at a sense of leisure – the beach is calm, it’s sunny in a nearly cloudless sky, the person is alone, but the pose is relaxed; arms casually at his or her sides as the person peers down into the water. The person’s pale skin signals their whiteness, though they are too small in the picture to be gendered. The person is not holding anything; the tone of the posture is static and comfortable. The person is positioned in the middle of the photograph of a beautiful waterside backdrop making them the focus of the picture, surrounded by nothing but the natural landscape. Being by the water in such a casual manner as the position of the person in the picture indicates, can be read as either travel or living, both of which signal a sense of privilege, wealth and leisure. To enjoy the waterside in such a casual manner requires both economic and social privilege. There have been many studies about the racialization of space or biopolitics (Giroux, 2006) where space is controlled and understood through barriers and gateways of racialized membership (Frankenberg, 1993a; Nelson, 2000; Johal, 2007; Stanley, 2011). Geographical space is organized hierarchically with the more desirable spaces, like the coastlines, being near the top. Space follows in the

same patterns as social and cultural capital, where those with more capital are open to more of the desirable spaces than those with less cultural capital, especially when referring to living spaces and tourist spaces (Glick, 2008). This is also very much linked to colonial projects where more desirable spaces are taken by people in dominant positions. In this context the blog is situated in North America where much of the prime land was taken from Aboriginals and/or Native Americans for the purposes of racialized white European settlement and Aboriginals and/or Native Americans were ghettoized to other, less desirable parcels of land to live. These spaces are now enjoyed by the privileged and the history of this colonial relocation is largely ignored and denied (Stanley, 2009). Consequently, geographical space is simply another register of revealing privilege (McIntosh, 1990) and dominance. Showing the person walking casually within a place of high privilege, like a coastline, therefore reveals that ‘white people’ are within the grouping of those with capital enough to gain access to and control of these spaces.

The last image within the banner shows a spread of bell peppers in a farmer’s market stall. Farmers’ markets have been noted as “frequented by particular demographics (notably white and middle to upper class) and, furthermore, that the ways in which they are established, managed, and promoted privilege particular demographics” (Colasanti, Conner & Smalley, 2010). They are also considered largely ‘white spaces’, where discourses of farmer’s markets position whiteness as the norm (Alkon & McCullen, 2010; Guthman, 2008) and the predominance of pale bodies makes these spaces “inclusive empowering spaces for a form of food politics that reflects liberal affluent, white identities and positionalities” (Alkon & McMullen, 2010, p. 939). Positioning farmers’ markets as ‘white spaces’ creates a circumstance where people of ‘ethnic minorities’ (to use Alkon and McCullen’s (2010) terms) feel uncomfortable, threatened, or discouraged from entering these spaces (Alkon &

McCullen, 2010; Colasanti, Conner & Smalley, 2010; Guthman, 2008). Those racialized Others who are present are overshadowed by racialized whites as Alkon and McCullen (2010) make clear: “market participants valorize the predominantly white vendors who ‘grew their food,’ rendering invisible the low-paid, predominantly Latino/a workers who do the bulk of the cultivation” (pp. 938-939). Consequently, the farmers’ market, like much high-end real estate as discussed above, reveals the continuation of white oppression and dominance as racialized others are excluded, silenced and even made invisible in these spaces, while whiteness is unproblematically favoured and fostered. Furthermore, racialized whites are more likely to see shopping at farmers’ markets as a point of leisure as they are more likely to have the time, transportation and opportunity to attend (Alkon & McCullen, 2010; Powell, Slater, Mirtcheva, Boa & Chaloupka, 2006; Moore & Roux, 2006). Markets that are associated with specific racialized groups however, are often related to ‘ethnic food’ and are more associated with cultural tourism experiences. Whiteness, as further articulated here, “likes” the creating of leisure spaces that make racialized others invisible and silent, while outwardly promoting ideologies of community and fairness.

The overall ideological framework this banner creates is a sense that whiteness is about privilege, leisure, economic power, and dominance or an “affluent, liberal habitus” (Alkon & McCullen, 2010). The images within the banner each signal a set of ideas and circumstances within the framework of the rest of the blog. Put together, the images and the framework of the blog create a rhetorical ideology or to use Barthes (1984/1972) term, a mythology of whiteness. Without reading a post, the viewer is already confronted with a racialized space that holds whiteness as central and defines it in very particular terms.

The outline of whiteness created by this banner lays the groundwork for the interpretations of whiteness as a racial construct for the rest of the blog. The banner becomes

part of the myth of whiteness. As explained above, Barthes (1984/1972) describes a myth as a second order sign where signs in language become the signifiers of larger clusters of signs, a 'global sign'. The second order signified in a myth is a culturally understood concept, like race, and whiteness. The second order signified draws from a network of culturally specific knowledges, ideologies, histories, and practices which are continually reinforced and reproduced within language and ideology. The signified whiteness then, together with the signifiers within the banner and the larger signifiers of the blog's metalanguage, creates a second order of signs, a language: the myth of whiteness. Each picture, put together with the title 'stuff white people like' makes the banner *represent* or signify whiteness through a repetition and clustering of signs which create the global sign of whiteness *as* an unproblematic and 'natural' system of privilege, dominance, and biologically founded in light-skin. The myth of whiteness then as it is defined here is reminiscent of Frankenberg's (2004) definitions described earlier. What is important to note is that the myth makes natural these definitions as if they are unproblematic, innocent and a-political. As Barthes (1984/1972) explains: "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (p. 132). The 'fact' of whiteness being defined here is as a performance of dominance, privilege and biological light skin that becomes the myth of whiteness the blog promotes. The 'facts' of the whiteness myth are important because they cover up the continued disenfranchisement and oppression of others in their definition and it is this innocence and political purity that must be uncovered and made problematic.

The definitions are made 'natural' by the myth and are even reinforced through continual repetition however. To this point, Gorham (1999) reveals that it is the continued re-

presenting of racial stereotypes or essentialisms of racialization in the media that maintain racial myths with two important results: “(1) With repeated exposure, automaticity between certain signs and certain myths will develop; and (2) since automatically primed contexts are available for subsequent processing, myths will affect the processing of subsequent information” (Gorham, 1999, p. 237)”. What this means is that the continued presence of racial signs reinforces racial myths and in doing so affects how people understand other racialized contexts. Consequently, it is through the repetition of a discourse of whiteness as defined through these terms, that the blog gains the power to produce a specific knowledge of white racialized identity - the myth of whiteness. Furthermore, Barthes (1984/1972) explains that myth has a double function; it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us. In this way, the blog works to both ‘notify’ the viewers or readers of the myth of ‘whiteness’ but at the same time to ‘impose’ its meaning, its reality as a myth upon the reader, reinforcing its sanctity and security within culture.

Each blog post shows the banner at the top and contains a title along with a photograph and text. The posts and the photograph within them echo and re-present the myth of whiteness the title banner articulates making them mutually reinforcing. Thus, the banner and the posts notify viewers of the myth of whiteness and also re-impose its language through particular signs and discursive formations in each specific blog post. The blog’s framing therefore comes to create a very distinct and well articulated understanding of whiteness, which has become myth in that it is de-politicized and de-historicized; it is made innocent fact. The main tenants of this myth operate on understandings of difference as consumable, invisible, and submissive. Racialized otherness in the photographs along with the title banner is controlled to be naturally outside and distinct from whiteness. Whiteness is defined through the title banner as dominant, performative (about consuming, experiencing,

and adopting) elements of the racialized Other. It is also about exclusivity, elitism, and luxury, all of which occur because of the power of dominance and continued supremacy within this myth of whiteness.

Though there is not space in this paper to address how each post creates and recreates the myth of whiteness, two in-depth case studies of two particular posts and their associative comments, reveal the process of racialization, representation and performances of racialized identities, and how the myth of whiteness, as defined within the banner of the blog, acts as a grounding point for the production of racialized knowledge. The analysis of the blog's first post "#1 Coffee" (clander, 2008, January 18) and how it continues the whiteness myth as well as how users initially take up and negotiate the blog and its framing, definitions and positions of white identity is discussed within the Chapter Two.

Chapter Two: The whiteness myth with extra foam: "#1 Coffee"

Figure 3, below, shows the very first entry in the blog "#1 Coffee," as it was posted by 'clander' on January 18, 2008. The picture in this post is set top left with the text starting to the right at the same level. The text starts beside the photograph, rather than underneath it, or before it, which suggests a mimetic relationship of text and image. They are visually on the same level, making their importance to the viewer almost equal. Because the photograph is on the left side of the screen, the eye is drawn to it first, before the text, as this is naturally how the Western world reads: right to left, top to bottom. The photograph reveals a light skinned young woman with a large white mug and a brightly lit background. Her face is in focus, her cheek pulled up into a smile, her eyes downcast into the cup, which focuses the viewers' attention back to the white mug in the foreground. She holds the cup in both hands up to her mouth; her hands are blurry, suggesting action. It is as though the photograph is catching the young woman in the act of enjoying a sip of her drink. The photograph is close-

up however, cut off at the woman's shoulder, her face mostly obscured by the cup as it is tipped towards her face.

#1 Coffee

January 18, 2008 by clander



There is no doubt that white people love coffee. Yes, it's true that asians like iced coffee and people of all races enjoy it. But I promise you that the first person at your school to drink coffee was a white person. You could kind of tell they didn't enjoy it, but they did it anyways until they liked it – like cigarettes.

White people all need Starbucks, Second Cup or Coffee Bean. They are also fond of saying "you do NOT want to see me before I get my morning coffee." White guys will also call it anything but coffee: "rocket fuel," "java," "joe," "black gold," and so forth. It's pretty garbage all around.

If you want to go for extra points – white people really love FAIR TRADE coffee, because paying the extra \$2 means they are making a difference.

Figure 3. Cropped screen shot of "#1 Coffee" blog entry with photograph. clander. (2008, January 18). #1 Coffee [web log post]. Retrieved from

The image of the young woman enjoying her drink is discovered to be about drinking coffee, as the title of the post suggests, and her light skin as well as the racialization within the first line of the post "There is no doubt that white people love coffee" (clander, 2008) racializes the young woman as white. Her light skin and relative youth create the image of the 'typical' racialized white coffee drinker the post is attempting to explain. The photograph becomes mimetic of the post; the photograph and the text reinforce one another. She is performing whiteness, and whiteness is a performance of her.

The text of the first listing, “Coffee,” continues to establish the racialized frame: “Yes, it’s true that asians [sic] like iced coffee and people of all races enjoy it” (Clander, 2008). ‘White’ becomes a legitimate race along with “Asian” and therefore they become racialized identities of difference where concepts of whiteness as an identity category are different and distinct from “Asian” as a social category.

Interestingly, “Asian” refers not to a colour, but rather to a region or culture, making ‘Asian’ more of a signifier of ethnicity than traditionally biological associations of race. Hall (2000) explains that ethnicity, which is more linked to a cultural inheritance of difference from the norm and something that displaces the biological into the cultural, is commonly applied to “Asian” whereas race is applied when a colour (read biological) marker is more distinct, as is the historical case for blackness, and in this instance being applied to whiteness. The relationship between the concepts of race and ethnicity are not distinguished in the blog and are lumped together under the larger banner of “races”. Hall (2000) explains, that race and ethnicity “constitute not two different systems, but racism’s two registers. In most situations, the discourses of biological and cultural difference are simultaneously at play” (Hall, 2000: p. 223). Race and white by extension become “floating terms” for a grouping of people based on some essentialized and predetermined set of criteria that are both cultural and biological in nature and are already assumed as ‘natural’ fact (Jhally, 2002). The very concepts and definitions of race and whiteness as they become defined within the blog entry are not questioned or disrupted from the satirical tone, but remains the problematic foundation for the blog’s claims.

The satirical nature of the frame is also introduced in this opening as the reader is drawn to the absolutisms of “there is no doubt”, and “it’s true”. Furthermore, the sarcastic and judgmental comments within the post such as “it’s pretty garbage all around” referring to

“white guys” that call coffee by many other names, reveal the satirical framing. The judgmental nature of the post is what highlights the satirical element and distinguishes the blog from other, more serious genres. Hodgart (1969/2010) explains, satire “has its origin in a state of mind which is critical and aggressive, usually one of irritation at the latest examples of human absurdity, inefficiency or wickedness” (p. 10). Therefore the writer of the blog is looking to critically expose the “absurdity” of cultural whiteness through this list of things that are supposed to define this associative identity. This seems to be a potentially anti-racist element of the blog, as it is able to critically point out the privileges of racialized whites to readers, but as Hodgart (1969/2010) further points out, “the satirist does not paint an objective picture of the evils he describes, since pure realist would be too oppressive. Instead he usually offers us a travesty of the situation, which at once directs our attention to actuality and permits an escape from it” (p. 12). Consequently, the satirical element not only allows for a critical look at the perceived outlines of whiteness and race as legitimate cultural and social categories, it also, and more importantly, allows readers to dismiss this critical outline as simply part of a caricature and escape the critical interrogation of the subject that would promote a disruption of its ‘natural’ associations and meanings. Readers are at once confronted with a critical view of whiteness and then given the back door to escape from a true and realistic confrontation with it. Also, as will be discussed below, despite the satirical framing, for many users, the blog creates a space for the celebration of various positionalities of whiteness, furthering and fuelling them, rather than questioning or disrupting them.

The blog post also reveals that the blogger distances himself from the associative identities the post reveals, speaking about “white people” and referring to the reader in their apparent otherness as the third person “you”. Positioning the reader in this way immediately marks the implicit reader as ‘other’ and consequently they cannot naturally lay claim to any

of the listed items as they are things “white people like” and by definition, not things that ‘others’ like. Right away this also marks out the boundaries of racialized exclusion, as those that are considered readers and not subjects are distanced from the performative identities of whiteness that are favoured in the blog. It is about acting “white” to have white friends, not becoming “white”. There is always a demarcation of white and other in the very premise of the blog.

Specifically, the blog entry on coffee (“#1 Coffee”, 2008, January 18) reveals definitions of whiteness in the elements of monetary worth and the sense of moral superiority and dominance. The discursive move that aligns whiteness with monetary prowess is done through the cultural association of ‘high end’ coffee houses “Starbucks, Second Cup or Coffee Bean”. These coffee houses are part of a group of coffee chains that pride themselves on superior coffee, more knowledgeable staff (given the professional title of baristas) and of course charge higher prices on average than other, considered less elitist, coffee chains. Monetary prowess is aligned with whiteness as a construct and white privilege as whiteness is associated with higher and more elitist cultural affiliations in general (Leonardo, 2004; McIntosh, 1990). Also, by extension, this alignment once again creates the reverse association of “you” or “other” with lack of monetary worth and elitist knowledge concerning ‘superior’ coffee houses. This is further emphasized in the last line of the post: “If you want to go for extra points – white people really love FAIR TRADE coffee, because paying the extra \$2 means they are making a difference” (clander, 2008, January 18, emphasis in original). Several important discursive moves are occurring in this last line. Critically, the author is revealing the absurdity of racialized white people’s belief in their own sense of morality and their belief that money can “make a difference,” which relates to Henry and Tator’s (2002) description of the concurrent disjunction between liberal

ideologies and deep seated discriminatory practices within democratic racism. This is exposed as the moral sense of giving money to “make a difference,” which is blanketed by the oppressive histories that created such need in the first place; namely from the outcomes of colonization and colonialism. The critical distinction that white people believe their monetary contributions are in fact making a difference is not as important as the implicit assertion that fair trade organizations are not ‘making a difference’. Furthermore, the statement exposes how the monetary differences, of who has money to give to whom, are part of a much larger system of racialized oppression with a long and gruelling history to which white people ultimately benefit (Leonardo, 2004). What lies ideologically within this statement is the author’s own judgment that the implicit other, the “you” is separate from the “white people,” once again creating the border maintenance of “us and them;” white people and Other. The fact that there is mention of a point system, of gaining and by extension losing points for certain behaviours, in the statement as mentioned above, “[i]f you want to go for extra points” (clander, 2008, January 18), creates the relationship of racialized white group association as something of a game, further belittling the position of the Other and the real implications of racial categories, social and cultural membership, even whiteness. Furthermore, and perhaps more poignantly, it is “white people” who get to decide who ‘gets points’ for this system and who does not. Once again, the racialized Other does not have a voice or a choice; the power and voice is still maintained by the dominant group where the racialized Other continues to be excluded and silenced. Whiteness gains more of an outline from this post, revealing that dominant and oppressive ideologies steeped in colonial history are still pertinent to definitions of whiteness, as privilege and power are results of that history. Whiteness is also very much marked by colour as well, and Otherness is clearly marked through disadvantage and silenced voices of those who did not benefit from history.

Race is furthermore defined within these confines, as whiteness is, in this context, a race and has performative, oppressive, and biologically grounded registers.

Border patrol: identities and negotiations of whiteness.

The blog becomes, and as seen clearly through the discussions of users' comments that follow, a site of contestation over racialized knowledge, especially knowledge concerning whiteness. All of the comments associated with the blog post relate to race as an identity marker where the blog entry acts as a grounding point for discussions of what makes (or does not make) a person white. Though some commentators tend to dismiss or are against the boundaries of white association the blog tends to claim, they are not against the fact that a white race exists at all, but rather their comments focus on membership maintenance and norm maintenance. Their privilege in relation to a racialized identity however, is *not* called into question. Whiteness does not, like many other racialized categories of difference, function as a means of devaluation (Diamond, 1994; Frankenberg, 2004) but rather functions to maintain the outlines of privilege (Leonardo, 2004).

Many of the user screen names use racialization as if it were a legitimate way to mark their position in the discussion. Anything from "george w", "Experienced White Person," "The Wrong Kind of White Guy," "another white guy" and "BurdenedWhiteMan" to "a black brother," "A Black Guy" and "Half White (not half wit!)" colour the user names in the comments. The users define themselves in an arena that allows for complete self-definition (Tariani, 2007) by their race or their perceived relationship to this social category. It is because the blog has famed race as the viable means of social categorization that the users have come to reproduce this categorization and use it as a means of identity formation in their online world and within their comments. Race is consequently understood within the power dynamics of social classification, where using a screen name that creates a link to

white membership affords the user a place of higher standing in that hierarchy, and also affords them an in-group position in the discussions of whiteness. Therefore even within the Internet, which can be seen for the Web 2.0 era to be a place of encouraged and uninhibited creation (Lankshear and Noble, 2007), the framework of the blog does not disrupt categories or dominant definitions of race, but rather teaches the users to reinstate them. By using race as a viable category for identity in this online forum, the social and cultural hierarchies inherent within racialization are also reinstated and re-inscribed.

Interestingly, many of the comments that reject the notion that white people like coffee are rejecting the wider associations of essentialist categories of race associated with whiteness. What these comments make clear is that people who identify themselves as white are against the concept that one should be defined by such an arbitrary notion such as liking coffee, but do not realize that they are more than ready to define others by equally arbitrary notions such as skin colour or other biologically or culturally stereotypical ideas and have been doing so for over a century (Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003). They do not want to have themselves defined as 'white' by their like or dislike of coffee, but are more than eager to say that they *do* define themselves according to the colour of their skin and the power and privileges it affords. Many of the posted comments begin with the concession: "I'm white but..." As one particularly poignant example submitted by "Lofter" (2008, February 17) explains:

Gee... I'm white, but I can't stand coffee? Does this somehow diminish my white-ness? Can I still claim 'caucasian' on my job applications, or should I check the box next to 'other'?

I'm so confused... (Lofter, 2008, February 17)

Though this post seems to follow the satirical nature of the blog itself, the critical undercurrent of the comment does not go unnoticed. The very fact that “Lofter” and many others found that they must write about how they do not somehow fit the mould of whiteness offered in the blog post suggests that they have come to question their membership in this social category, if only fleetingly, and are negotiating the definitions of “white” the blog describes. They do, as “Lofter’s” comment illustrates, maintain that they in fact belong to a social group of “white” and as “Lofter” makes clear, can find other means to define their membership. It also illustrates the very performative nature of these social categories. Lofter comes to question his or her membership based on the arbitrary attributes the blog outlines, and subsequently reveals the performance of racialized categories, as ‘drinking coffee’ becomes a performative attribute of whiteness. What remains unnoticed is how racialized categories are always already enacted upon bodies and performance becomes secondary. “Lofter’s” suggestion of checking “Caucasian” or “other” on job applications points to the very fact that one cannot escape the attribution of the supposed biological onto bodies with significant social consequences. It also reveals “Lofter’s” own understanding of race as being predominantly a biological concept, not a performative one. Performance becomes the maintenance or troubling of racialized categories that have already been established and marked onto bodies. “Caucasian” becomes synonymous with “white” and “other” becomes racialized as people other than white where white remains the center and colour the periphery. This shows the continued (although troubling) association of biology to race. What is happening within this discursive link is that biology is being linked to social and cultural status and context. As stated previously, though anthropologists have argued for several years that there is no biological connection to race and it is rather simply a social construct, the ideological association from the 20th Century still seems to hold (Diamond,

1994; Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003). Furthermore, “Lofter’s” comment also points to the strategic move of positioning otherness as inferior to whiteness or “caucasian” as it is only through an inability to determine where he or she may racially ‘fit’ that the concept of ‘otherness’ comes into play, as if it were a catch-all category for all other identity formations that are not readily accepted by society. Whiteness once again comes to define itself through a dominance over ‘other’ racial categories and meanings where “Lofter” is more than aware of the myth of whiteness as being defined through a dominant and consequently oppressive means in relation to other racial formations. “Lofter” also reveals a negotiation of the blog’s definitions of whiteness, relying on the biological grounding of racial definitions to define “white” where performative registers do not, for “Lofter”, seem to “fit”.

There are some comments that fall into the category of membership maintenance of other racialized “non-white” identities as they relate to the fact the user feels the blog illustrates the ways whiteness functions and by consequence tells them something about their non-white identity. “Alina” (2008, February 20) is a particularly important example:

I’m non-white, and you’ve helped me realize that pretty much ALL the things that I’ve felt inadequate about over the years (don’t snowboard or do yoga, don’t drink wine or coffee, don’t go to plays, don’t enjoy 80s nights (SO TRUE), don’t own a bike, don’t listen to public radio, etc.) are really just white things! Of couurse [sic] I don’t fit the mold! Wow... even the kitchen appliance obsession suddenly makes sense! And the co-ed sports! And the cottages they buy on man-made lakes, so they can own waterfront property! That’s a lot of exclamation marks, but I mean every single one. I am serious. This has actually affected my sense of self-worth. I feel so much better now. Thank you. (Alina, 2008, February 20)

Despite the fact that “Alina” claims to be “serious,” the tone of his or her post is something that cannot be definitively decided. Even so, the post reveals some important elements of how someone claiming “non-white” status relates to the blog’s definitions of white identity. Many of the other ‘traits’ “Alina” lists in the post refer to other posts on the blog itself, which are not addressed directly in this paper. “Alina’s” major point remains however; it was *because* of the blog that he or she was able to understand how he or she was ‘non-white’. The blog then became for “Alina”, and several other similar users, a point of reference for a racialized identity to which they could themselves relate. These users come to define themselves through the negative – they are defined by their relative *dislike* for many of the elements of the blog, such as coffee. The essential category of whiteness displayed in the blog, then, becomes a mythical truth (Barthes, 1984/1972), creating social and cultural definitions of ‘white’ people and ‘non-white’ people alike. What remains at issue and hidden below the surface is the continued claim that this is a viable and reasonable way to define a group; first through relative skin colour (white or non-white) and then through arbitrary attributes ‘naturally’ linked to those skin colours. The knowledge users have produced then for the blog, is not about questioning or breaking down understandings of race but rather about the importance and maintenance of race and racialization as a social signifier. Furthermore, the register of defining whiteness through performance, and consequently defining non-whiteness through lack of performance, also remains intact and significant to the definition and demarcation of racialized boundaries of identity here.

‘It’s funny because it’s true’: using humour and ridicule to maintain the status quo.

Humour functions in a curious manner in the blog comments. In the blog itself, the satirical nature creates a space where whiteness can be talked about in a semi-critical manner

and also where readers can negotiate their sense of the humour and its role in their ability to make meaning from the entry. Humour, for the majority of the users, functions as a means to legitimize claims and a way of managing critical views through humourous ridicule or the classic claim to a critical user's lack of humour. Not only does the blog itself gain an authority that it holds some claim to truth about whiteness, but the satirical nature of the blog allows the users to use the blog's definitions to uncritically forward their own understandings of "white" and racialized identity politics. The satire creates a space where dominant views can be legitimated, and at the same time, critical views can be controlled (Billig, 2005). When commentators do attempt to critically engage with the blog or another user's comments, these comments are often disregarded, down-played and belittled by other users in a tone that is meant to use ridicule to promote laughter. As stated above, the satirical framing of the blog allows for that fantastical escape from the critique that the blog puts forth and users continually rely on this satirical element to avoid critical engagement with touchy or 'taboo' topics like white privilege and racism. These users employ the humourous tone of the blog entry and re-appropriate it to reject resistance and critical engagement with whiteness of other users and revert back to 'it's only supposed to be funny' mentality. They cannot accept that this blog might in fact be racist or questionable for other users. As "another white guy" (2008, March 20) comments: "this site are [sic] so funny [...] it's not meant to be racists just funny/ so enjoy it don't act like it hurts you are [sic] anyone else reading it". "Another white guy" is responding to a thread of other blog comments that questions the boundaries and legitimacy of the blog's racialized identity politics. Also to be noted, a user with the screen name "a black brother", which will be discussed further below, submitted the original critical post. "Another white guy" takes the moral high-ground in his or her comment, positioning him/herself against others who are considered too sensitive:

“don’t act like it hurts you”. This comment also uses ridicule to belittle the actual emotions of the users who do critically engage the blog, seeing them as merely “acting” as if the blog is bothersome to them, taking the legitimacy out of these claims. Comments like this one use humour and ridicule to control and manage sites of critical engagement and resistance (Billig, 2005). By using ridicule to promote laughter from other users, the original critical message is downplayed and belittled, making the potential critical engagement with the blog and its content something that is beyond what many users ‘want’ to encounter and the limits of the social order. Billig (2005) explains this type of humour as disciplinary humour: “Disciplinary humour mocks those who break social rules, and thus can be seen to aid the maintenance of those rules” (p. 202). The rules are ideological and social in nature, unwritten and unofficial, but ‘known’ and maintained by all who subscribe to them. What this implies is that these social ‘rules’ are very real and that users who critically engage the blog have unwittingly broken them. In this context, the ‘rules’ involve the politics of humour; that it should not be over-analyzed, should be left simply as humorous and critical engagement with the humour is in ‘bad taste’. Furthermore, the ‘rules’ involve the maintenance of the fact that the whiteness should not be interrogated, as it is a ‘natural’ assumption that the blog entries speak a kind of truth about whiteness. This is also a way of maintaining the whiteness myth as the lack of critical engagement allows the myth to continue ‘innocently’ and ‘unproblematically’ as sites of questioning are controlled or belittled. Regardless of whether or not users find their own truths within the blog entry and can identify with some of the attributes is not necessarily as important as the fact that these attributes are coded or literally coloured and associated with a race. Also, this seemingly natural association shows that whiteness is an accepted social category for many users and is naturally associated with

aspects of privilege and dominance like being able to buy expensive coffee, or contribute monetarily to globalized initiatives, no matter how suspect they are.

The blog comments also illustrate how debates over who gets to make fun of whom are important. The politics of humour are far more complicated than is commonly assumed. The hierarchical nature of the blog users echoes the racialized hierarchy in the offline world. It is consistently the self-proclaimed “non-white” or “black” users that are contributing to the critical discussion about the problematic nature of the blog’s racialized subject matter, as is the case with this example, and equally as consistently the self-asserted racialized white users who use ridicule and humour to belittle the comments of the users racialized as non-white. Consequently, the users proclaiming to be “white” are those most concerned with maintaining the status quo; the myth of whiteness being outlined in the blog, without critical comment or engagement. These commentators feel as though, as Billig (2005) states above, a social order has somehow been transgressed by other more critical users and must be re-established. As “Anonymous” (2008, April 6) states below it is only those who “miss the point of the jokes” who are “crossing the line”: “i don’t think the site is racist at all...but the comments start crossing the line when readers really miss the point of the jokes” (Anonymous, 2008, April 6). Therefore it is commenters like “a black brother” who attempt to critically engage the social politics of the blog’s identity formation that is seen as “crossing the line”.

To re-establish this order, and respond to the critical comments, the users employ the same means as the blog, echoing its satirical and humourously critical tone. Two important things are discursively occurring then within these seemingly trivial jibes at other users: some of the racialized white users understand critical engagement with the blog as something that is worthy of ridicule and consequently something beyond the boundaries of the ‘social

rules', and more importantly, the racialized white users are attempting to re-instate a racialized hierarchy within the blog comments by being the very keepers of these rules, morally and socially superior to those that they ridicule. This type of politics of humour also employs an element of dominance and oppression, as these racialized whites, silencing those that oppose or question the myth of whiteness' 'natural' dominance and privileged positioning, overrule critical comments. What becomes evident is that some of these racialized white users feel compelled to maintain discursive social rules, because they somehow feel other users are threatening their sense of identity, their link to the white myth (Leonardo, 2004; van Dijk, 1993a) that they find 'natural'. These racialized white users therefore use the blog as a legitimate site of racialized identity, affirmation of their link to privilege and their position of dominance, and are eager³ to quell any comments or engagement that may come to question that 'natural' association (See Appendix A for an example of responses to 'a black brother's' post).

This occurs because the discourse formations of humour and whiteness are both functioning here to control and order how users talk about and respond to critique. Discourses of humour and of whiteness are distinctive discursive formations that have certain ways that people can 'acceptably' speak, write, and create knowledge of them:

Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of

³ Looking simply within a three-day time span, there are eighteen replies to 'a black brother's' post (2008, March 25) (See Appendix A). Many of them are factual, however there are also a number of replies that attempt to humourously reassert the satire of the blog, without dealing with questions of racism that 'a black brother' poses.

conducting, ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. (Hall, 1997, p. 44)

The comments of controlling critique then, have to come to rely on their knowledge of these discourses (humour and whiteness) and re-appropriate them here in order to continue the power relations of these discourses. They have, as stated above, ‘rules’ that are ideologically situated and common-sense in nature in order to avoid critique to maintain their social status. The knowledge of whiteness and humour that is being constructed and promoted here is a continuation of the status quo – the ‘rules’ are being reinstated, not questioned, and consequently the discursive formations of whiteness and humour remain intact. While counter-discourses will always appear in every discursive formation, it is the fact that the majority of users attempt to control these counter-discourses that is significant. These counter-discourses are important sites of new knowledge production and potential for anti-racism and must therefore be promoted, rather than silenced. What this analysis attempts to show is how such counter-discourses get silenced in the hopes of creating knowledge of how such processes occur and their power to remain dominant and unquestioned, especially within genres that are commonly considered non-serious, like satire.

Each subsequent post follows a similar layout and discursive framework, and claims to continually re-articulate whiteness as an unproblematic performance of privilege and dominance allowing the myth of whiteness’ innocence as a race to become more defined and gain more examples to its cause. The pattern of the myth becomes more apparent and ‘natural’ with each subsequent post. By producing a myth of whiteness that becomes ‘natural’, the blog is also creating a knowledge of whiteness that becomes depoliticized, de-historicized and de-contextualized; it becomes ‘innocent’ fact. In doing so, the blog’s myth of whiteness *becomes truth* as its ‘innocent’ knowledge affects people’s understandings,

meanings, and identities in relation to whiteness and allows them to see whiteness and its relation to privilege in an unproblematic and common-sensical way. Further, race becomes here a link to identity that is controlled through levels of dominance, where “white” allows for more social leverage than “black” or “other” in these conversations and is legitimated in the satirical framework and the definitions of whiteness the blog engenders.

It is the unproblematic positioning of races within a hierarchy of dominance as well as the power of the systemic underpinning of these positionings that is the critical point here. The blog acts as a site of reinforcement of these ‘in the world’ knowledges of racial hierarchy and white myths of unproblematic ‘biologically’ grounded privilege, performance and dominance. The myth of whiteness is favoured and promoted within the blog as it reflects reality for many users, and those who do not see it as so are policed out of the conversation in order for the dominant view of whiteness, that the blog relates, to remain. It is the continued reinforcement of the myth of whiteness within subsequent posts and how such reinforcements is taken up and negotiated within the user comments of “#92 Book Deals” that the analysis turns to now.

Chapter Three: Racialization fit to print: “# 92 Book Deals”

With the popularity of the blog, clander added at least one, if not more, entries to the list each day. Within three months, the blog had gained enough fame and recognition to transfer its content to a new audience. On March 26, 2008 he wrote a post entitled “# 92 Book Deals” where he announced, using the same formatting as in the previous entries, he had received a book contract with Random House Publishing based on the framing and content of the blog. At number 92 in the blog’s list of “stuff white people like”, “Book Deals” acts as a halfway point in the blog’s life cycle. It is the point where users have become familiar with the framework of the blog. “Book Deals”, and the comments analyzed

within the parameters of this case study, reveals this process of continued use of racialized signs to re-present whiteness that ‘naturally’ link light skin privilege and dominance to racialized white identity in order to maintain the salience of the myth of whiteness. *Figure 4* below shows a screen shot of the blog post.

#92 Book Deals

March 26, 2008 by clander



The combination of white people and books has been a pretty solid combo for the past few hundred years. So whenever a white person is given a chance to write a book, it's considered a pretty big deal. This is especially true when it happens to someone who started a blog that they never expected to reach more than 100 people.

Our research has slowed in recent weeks as we worked out the details, but Stuff White People Like are proud to announce that our textbook on white people is becoming a reality.

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780812979916>

The book will feature 2/3 all new content and is going to be released by Random House in August.

But that does not mean that the site will stop examining the stuff that white people like.

If you'd like to receive updates about the site or about the book, please sign up for the email subscription service on the right sidebar.

Also worth noting: white people like having their dreams come true when they least expected it. Thank you to every single person who has read the blog, written in, or shared it with their friends via email, IM, or personal blog.

Christian

Figure 4. Cropped screen shot of "#92 Book Deals" from original post. clander. (2008, March 26). #92 Book Deals [web log post]. Retrieved from <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/2008/03/26/92-book-deals/>

As seen above in *Figure 4*, the top of the post for “Book Deals” features a full width picture of a light-skinned man seemingly casually throwing a bottle into a recycle bin. The surface denoted meaning of the picture does not seem to fit the title of the post. Upon closer inspection, there are many discursive elements within the photograph and its relationship to the post and to the blog on a whole which re-articulate signs of whiteness as being defined as a performance of dominance and privilege from particular blog posts in order to reaffirm the whiteness myth the blog creates. The objects in the photograph, including the man himself, act as signs that taken both in the context of the blog and the myth of whiteness the blog outlines, comes to rearticulate that myth and further its re-presentation, thus promoting its power as a form of ‘truth’ about whiteness. This becomes a ‘regime of truth’, where discursive formations, the myth of whiteness, and the discourses and signs that they police and perpetuate, carry powerful knowledges that effect people’s understanding of whiteness, of race, and of their identities in relation to these categories (Hall, 1997).

The photograph, as stated previously, carries in its very genre a strong perception of its ability to reflect ‘reality’, what Barthes (1977) terms ‘analogon’. Once again, the man’s light skin in the photograph racializes him as white, making his actions and position as the pictured figure for the post realistic. The association of racialized whiteness as a constructed social category is ‘naturally’ associated with light skin colours where concepts of culture and concepts of biology are still worryingly intermixed. The man pictured here stands in as a white person, doing and acting in some way that resembles the post’s text and representing the performance of whiteness the blog attempts to outline. Furthermore, the gestures in the photograph of the person casually smiling while recycling an empty bottle of iced tea attempt to reveal the casualness or everyday-ness of the situation, as if the viewer of the photograph

has caught the person in action. The naturalness of the scene once again produces the knowledge of whiteness as a performative identity linked to objects and complex sociological ideologies; ‘this is what white people do on an ordinary, typical sunny day’, rather than something that is contrived and posed. As Barthes (1977) explains however, photographs carry the sense of lacking signification, but in fact reveal many layers of connoted meanings.

The use of objects and poses are two of the ways Barthes (1977) explains connotation to become present in photographs. For objects, he states, “the connotation somehow ‘emerges’ from all these signified units [the objects themselves] which are nevertheless ‘captured’ as though the scene were immediate and spontaneous, that is to say, without signification” (p. 23). This means that the placement of the objects in the photograph – including in this case the man as a white person himself – are all given meaning and connotation through the cultural ‘lexicon’ from which they are derived. The actions and objects within the photograph relate to other posts within the blog, each element acting as a complex, clustered sign of whiteness as explained in depth in each specific post. These actions and objects re-represent racialized whiteness in relation to performances of dominance and privilege and as the clustered signs come to create the global sign, the myth once again. The man is recycling (“#64 Recycling”, 2008, February 14), which is related to white people’s sense of ‘morality’. The bottle he recycles is a bottle of iced tea (“#13 Tea, 2008, January 21) related to the long history of colonial expansion of the West. He recycles at a Whole Foods store as seen on the partially visible, but unmistakable, logo on the recycle bin. The Whole Foods store encompasses two different posts, one on the store itself (“#48 Whole Food and Grocery co-ops”, 2008, February 3), and the other on its products (“#6 Organic food”, 2008, January 19) both of which relate to the previous discussion from the

title banner regarding farmers' markets. The T-shirt the man wears also incorporates two posts within one semiotic sign – specifically the post on T-shirts (“#84 T-shirts”, 2008, March 7), which speaks to an elite consumerist society, where ‘rare’ and ‘vintage’ are considered more prestigious. The T-shirt also reveals aspects of the second post (“#2 Religions their parents don’t belong to”, 2008, January 18), based on the Star of David on his T-shirt. The appropriation of religions that a white person was not born into is also reminiscent of the analysis of dominance and appropriation of Other cultural, or in this case religious, endeavours as part of whiteness. It is the very act of appropriation that is part of whiteness, of taking and dominating over Others, that is considered an unproblematic and even overtly celebrated trait of whiteness. From this element, the complex sign within the ‘Star of David’ erupts an important and powerful discussion of racialized performances and concepts of whiteness, which will be discussed below. What is important to understand here is that by placing these objects within the photograph, the connoted meanings of racialized white performances are reinforced in the same way that they are in the title banner for the blog. By associating these things with both the blog and with performative whiteness, the photograph in its ability to act as an analogue of reality, creates a knowledge that re-enforces the premises of the blog and of its understandings of whiteness: This *is* whiteness in *real life*. Consequently, the photograph and the blog contents are mutually reinforcing performative registers of whiteness. Whiteness becomes defined by the performance of buying organic foods, recycling, drinking tea, joining different religions from the ones inherited from parents, as well as the performance of whiteness as related to biological understandings of pigment levels. The picture of the light-skinned man exhibiting and performing some of the items listed in the blog re-creates the link of light skin to the social performance of dominance and privilege, once again echoing the myth of whiteness. What is intriguing with

this type of observation is the invasion of the satirical tone of the blog itself, which undermines the meanings created by the photograph as ‘authentic’. Is the photograph a mimicry of the ordinary, or the ordinary in ‘reality’ as the genre of the photograph would suggest? It is within the reactions and the comments that follow this post that the meanings produced from this image and blog post remain largely within the realm of seriousness; the authenticity of the photograph to echo reality overpowers the sense of questioning or subversion the satirical framework of the blog may have produced. Users would not make any of these connections if the person pictured in this post or in any post were racialized as Other because of the colour of their skin. Consequently, though the register of performance is favoured within the blog, the link to biology is always at play in the blog’s conception of racialized “white”.

The text itself comes to deal more directly with the title of the post: a book deal. Overall it remains relatively informative about the book deal itself, “featuring 2/3 new content” and an August release date with a link for users to order the book or get more information. The post maintains the importance of continuing the “research of stuff white people like” poking at the sense of being ‘studied’ as a race. Scientific, psychological and sociological study of Other races to determine hierarchy has a past, whose effects are still reminiscent in the salience of ‘colour-coded’ categories of people (Beasley, 2010; Blackhouse, 2010; Goldberg, 1993; Gould, 1996). The satirical tone that highlights the ‘study’ and ‘research’ of people belittles the real and enduring effects of ‘study’ and ‘research’ on racialized Others where the aim of these ‘scientific’ studies was to classify people in a hierarchy of races where White or Caucasian was at the top (Goldberg, 1993). By belittling this history, the blog denies the privilege whiteness has gained from this history and the legacy of its oppressive politics on people of colour (Leonardo, 2004). As Stuart Hall

relates in a lecture on the importance of race as a signifier, blackness *should* be about the political history of the oppression of a people, not about their genes (Jhally, 2002). What this means is that people must understand the political *history* of oppression as the context that makes them, in this case Black, and not understand their grouping according to their genetics. In the case of whiteness, understanding the history of oppressive tactics of racialized others has allowed whites to continue to enjoy the privileges gained from that oppression. By belittling the history, the blog once again denies the oppressive and dominating aspects of whiteness and celebrates the privileges as if they were natural markers of white identity. Furthermore, the tone of the post oscillates from maintaining the distanced ‘guidebook’ authority and a more personal tone than in any of the other previous posts, concluding with a signed message from “Christian” thanking those who have helped make this ‘dream’ possible:

Also worth noting: white people like having their dreams come true when they least expected it. Thank you to every single person who has read the blog, written in, or shared it with their friends via email, IM, or personal blog. – Christian (“# 92 Book Deals” 2008, March 26)

The separate subscript of the post breaks from the ‘textbook’ anonymous tone of the previous posts and brings the author to the fore. No longer does the blog post seem to follow the tone of anonymous authority on a subject matter, but rather it becomes more clearly an authored work. The connection between image and text becomes evident with this personal subscript; the man in the picture is the author/blogger. The deeper significance of the relations to the other posts also becomes clearer: the author/blogger is using his performance and link to the other posts to position himself as white. In order to solidify his in-group membership to the community of whiteness the blog the picture acts as evidence of his

racialized whiteness. To Christian, performing these characteristics, recycling, shopping at organic food stores, wearing vintage T-shirts, and subscribing to ‘other’ religions that were not those of your parents is to him *being white*. It is interesting to note that Christian picked the Jewish religion as the one he subscribes to as his ‘second’ religion. The choice signals something further about Christian’s own conception of whiteness. Because the second or ‘other’ religion is made foreign because it is not something one is familiar with and is not something one’s parents were part of, Jewishness is equated in this sense with foreignness, with non-whiteness. Jewishness is therefore not ‘white’ but ‘other’; something one performs as being part of the secondary religion of the conception of whiteness as appropriating otherness. Therefore Christian’s conception of whiteness is made clear – it a liberal performance of privilege, dominance and appropriation of otherness. What his position reveals however, is the anonymous author, “clander”, the unraced author of previous entries is suddenly visible, raced, with a face, an identity and consequently a social, cultural, and political ascribed position. This makes the author of the blog ‘Christian,’ a real and tangible part of the blog and its content for the first time. This new information and positioning of the author plays out in interesting ways within the user comments as they come negotiate the ‘author’ and his position within their meanings of the blog.

“Look at me, I’m white too!”: re-articulations of whiteness in the user comments.

The majority of the comments focus on simply congratulating ‘Christian’ on his book deal and users’ excitement at having a ‘textbook’ about white people. This alone speaks to the power of the blog as a knowledge producer of racialized whiteness as the users continue to accept and are now ready to promote commercially the blog’s framework of whiteness. Further, users often footnote their comments with their acceptance and re-presentation of the

blog's position of whiteness to support its ideology and mythic 'truth'. In effect, they explain how they are white because they subscribe to this performance of whiteness and position themselves through their performances of the blog's claims in the same manner Christian had done in the post's photo. "Dave's" comment reveals an example of the naturally understood association of the blog's explanation of privilege performance and unquestioned dominance *as* whiteness: "Man I think that I like almost everything in this blog...I am incredibly white....[sic]" (Dave, 2008, March 26). 'Dave's' comment is a common thread in many of the posts, that the blog confirms a certain white identity, recreating the 'truth' of racialized whiteness as a 'natural' performance of privilege and dominance, consequently rearticulating the white race myth. It also makes the association that one signals the other in a reciprocal way – "I like these things" = white, where white is defined by a 'like' for these attributes within the blog. It also shows once again the hidden Other that is required to understand identity. Whiteness is understood through a 'like' for privileged identity (without the admission of the oppressions of racialized Others involved in that privilege) and consequently Otherness is defined through its non-identification with the performance of a privileged identity and a lack of power to subscribe to such privilege. This is never questioned, but remains the foundation and the continuation of whiteness *as the very definition* of privilege and dominance as mimetic of whiteness. As in the first post "Coffee" the boundaries and understandings of racial identity and performance are largely unquestioned and remain part of the framework of the blog's claims. What this post shows however, is the more items within the 'list,' the more privileged performances come to unproblematically and naturally symbolize whiteness. The power involved within these registers of performance, dominance and biology to define whiteness remains the 'natural' foundations for racialized identity.

What becomes evident in the posts is the influence of these performative attributes to act as definitional criteria for white racial identity. Many comments congratulate the blogger on his book deal⁴ and establish their white identity not only through potential screen names or outward naming as in “Coffee” but more importantly, by making reference to other posts in the blog specifically as criteria for white membership. “Katie’s” comment is a particularly telling example: “Congrats! I can’t wait to buy this for all my white friends with a sense of humour. I felt very white today...walking down the street listening to my Ipod, texting on my cell phone, drinking bottled water from Starbucks, on my way to the natural store to buy organic apples. How many points do I get?” (Katie, 2008, March 26). In this post “Katie” is attempting to ‘get points’ (which relates to the continued theme of whiteness membership as a game as demonstrated in the first post) by exhibiting many of the ‘traits’ the blog outlines as part of the performance of whiteness. Her comment echoes both the banner and the post’s exhibition of the racialized white performances. “Katie” has picked up on the ‘myth of whiteness’ the blog has created and is recreating it to establish her identity as a white person. The blog’s myth of whiteness then becomes once again a self-fulfilling ‘truth’ – I am white because I perform these things, and I perform these things because I am white, and perhaps more importantly, there is nothing unnatural about this. The myth then perpetuates itself. Specifically, Katie is revealing her knowledge of the blog’s specific performative markers of whiteness as well as her relative adherence to these makers to secure her racialized white identity. She mentions several of the other posts in her comment making her feel “very

⁴ Some examples: Adam. (2008, March 26); Anjali. (2008, March 26); Anonymous. (2008, March 26); Another anon. (2008, March 26); April. (2008, March 26); Charlotteotter. (2008, March 26); Dave. (2008, March 26); DDDddd. (2008, March 26); Emmer. (2008, March, 26); Getting Whiter. (2008, March 26); Haley (2008, March 27); Hell. (2008, March 27); I Cried All the Way 2 the BANK!. (2008, March 26); Jamiee (2008, March 27); JoelG. (2008, March 26); Nonwhiteonlooker. (2008, March 26); Praxenakis. (2008, March 26); Smart chic. (2008, March 27); Wendyatum. (2008, March 26); TightlyWhitey415. (2008, March 26). Re: #92 Book Deals. Retrieved from

<http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/2008/03/26/92-book-deals/?cp=all#comments>

white”: “Starbucks” is mentioned in the very first post (“#1 Coffee”, 2008, January 18) in relation to coffee, as a place frequented by whites because of their ‘elite’ coffee culture. Organic food is post number six (“#6 Organic food”, 2008, January 19) by the same name, which openly relates the need for monetary wealth to purchase organic food and white peoples’ desires to eat ‘healthier’ regardless of cost. Katie also mentions her “ipod” which relates to clander’s post “#40 Apple products” (2008, January 30) where Apple’s many electronic gadgets, including Ipods, are part of a performative aspect of whiteness as “Apple products tell the world you are creative and unique. They are an exclusive product line only used by every white college student, designer, writer, English teacher, and hipster on the planet” (clander, 2008, January 30). This small quote in itself reveals the link between monetary worth and whiteness. Apple is also linked to ‘creative’ professions that highlights the link between whiteness and the ability to choose professions based on desires, rather than necessity and the privilege to have open access to education that helps with such artistic, potentially high paying, highly socially desired, and low physical labour professions. What this reveals is the link between social privilege, social mobility and racialized whiteness. This once again shows whiteness as a performance of privilege while silencing the oppressive behaviours that give way to such privilege and therefore revealing how the three registers of racialized white identity are always at play recreating the myth of whiteness. Katie’s post also makes reference to the post entitled “#48 Whole Foods and grocery co-ops” (2008, February 3) which speaks to racialized whites’ preference to buy their groceries at ‘natural’ stores, which are of course more exclusive and cost more than regular large-urban grocery stores (Powell, Slater, Mircheva, Boa, & Chaloupka, 2006). Finally, her post references “#76 Bottles of water” (2008, February 26) that relates white people’s love for bottled water as being both about the ability to buy “the most expensive premium bottled

water (Fiji and Voss)” and those white people who “need to run their water through some sort of filter (Brita or PUR) before they put it into their bottle” as they are “too good for tap water” (clander, 2008, February 26). This makes the distinction between those who do and do not drink tap water as a difference of economic advantage. Being *able* to drink bottled water becomes a marker of having ability and access to not only fresh tap water, but also bottled water. Once again this distinction creates a boundary of privilege between white people who are ‘too good for [simple] tap water’ and conversely those Others who are *not* too good, or cannot drink anything other than tap water. In general, “Katie’s” post reveals that people *not* racialized as white are *not* performing privilege – having Ipod, texting on cell phones, drinking ‘Starbucks’ bottled water, and buying organic fruit from a “natural store”. If membership maintenance to a group requires continued redefinition of its boundaries, this comment reveals that whiteness as a racial category is once again defined by the register of performance, social and cultural power, dominance and privilege, rather than by Otherness, disenfranchisement, lack of power, and biological or cultural essentialist devaluation. It is about ‘representing’ the racialization of whiteness as unquestioned privilege and at the same time about policing the boundaries of that privilege and silencing its oppressive tactics by reinforcing and repeating its attributes. “Katie” is revealing her in-group status through her performance of many of the blog’s representations of whiteness; she uses the blog to position herself racially as white.

Not only does the blog enact the myth of whiteness, it also allows for users to see their membership as dependant on its specific criteria. Both “Dave” and “Katie” in the previous examples use the blog’s other postings to position themselves as white and therefore manage their level of authority within the discussion of whiteness. Comments also use the blog as a means of understanding membership as a continuum, where the number of

posts a user identifies with relates to their level of whiteness. “Susan’s” (2008, March 26) comment reveals not only how both her and her husband replicate the myth of whiteness, they also reveal performative gradients of the whiteness:

Can’t wait to read it – my husband and I are big fans since I discovered you were writing about him (outdoor wear and shorts). He thinks you are following him around for inspiration. I am not quite so white, but maybe I’ll catch up when the book is published! (Susan, 2008, March 26)

Like “Dave” and “Katie”, “Susan” finds the blog represents her husband as she tongue-in-cheek speaks to how the author is “following [her husband] around for inspiration”. “Susan” also makes reference, in her parenthetical aside, to other posts in the blog to position her husband as racially white through the blog’s outline. She mentions “outdoor wear”, referring to post “#87 Outdoor Performance Wear” (clander, 2008, March 11) and “shorts”, which refers to post number 86 by the same title (clander, 2008, March 11). Once again, users employ the blog’s framework of whiteness to understand their racialized identity. Discursively the comment is reinforcing the authority of whiteness the blog outlines making one’s adherence to its framework, to the ‘items’ on the list, *the* performative marker of whiteness. Susan’s comment speaks to gradients of whiteness as she says she is “not so white” as her husband. She reveals that it is the framework of the blog, and by extension the book that will follow the same format, that will allow her to “catch up” to the whiteness of her husband, to become more ‘white’. Therefore the quantitative nature of exhibiting more (and by extension less) of the attributes of whiteness the blog (and the book) describes reveals a person’s ‘level’ of whiteness. This is also reminiscent of the point system from the “Coffee” post and “Katie’s” comment discussed above. By creating this type of framework, where a person can be more or less white through performance reveals the conditional and

fluid nature of the social category of whiteness. This performance is juxtaposed with the sense of biological founding of the racialized ‘group’ – white skin making some absolutely white or non-white. These comments do not speak to each user’s level of pigmentation, but rather, because there are no visual cues in this online framework, performative cues act as the most important registers of positioning one within the white category of social membership. Whiteness as a seemingly innocent myth, devoid of history and context, becomes the reason for users’ like, or dislike, of the privileged social context the blog describes, not the long and troubled history of racism that equated light skin with ability, wealth, means, and opportunity that light skinned people in North America are still profiting from today (McIntosh, 1990; Leonardo, 2004; Stanley, 2011). These users come to see the power of performance as central to racialized definition, where registers of biology (light skin) and dominance (which allows for such performances) remain secondary.

Whitewashed identity: extending the whiteness myth.

With the white racialized myth intact and well established by the framework of the blog, the blog posts, and by the confirmations of many users through their comments, some users come to add their own performances that they come to see as white. What these performances reveal is the consistent ‘innocent’ and depoliticized association of whiteness to privilege. The examples that users put forward as white are also instances of privilege and dominance. The conversation between these users is a particularly poignant example:

Mr Whitey: Congrats! White people like CLEANING UP BEFORE THE
MAID!!! (2008, March 26)

Suze: Guilty! My housekeeper only comes once a month but I always rush to
clean up the house before she gets here. Congrats Christian! (2008, March 26)

“My Whitey” gives the example of “cleaning up before the maid” as a performance of whiteness, but what this conversation reveals, is that this performances of whiteness is once again a performance of privilege that hides the problematic oppression of racialized others it requires to occur. In “Suze’s” admission that, she too, “cleans up before the maid”, she is also identifying herself in relation to this privileged performance. What becomes more intriguing is “Elin Jarvis-McCann’s” (2008, April 20) response to this discussion that follows,

Suze, when you write (re: your housekeeper) “I always rush to clean up the house before she gets here”, allow me to let you in on a secret tactic that other white people are adopting. Get a housekeeper for the housekeeper. I now have a very nice Ethiopian girl come in twice a week to clean the house before my regular housekeeper (an excellent older Gautemalan lady) comes in for the full house-cleaning. Now I get to enjoy a house that is always either (a) clean, or (b) clean enough to be ready-to-clean.

In “Elin Jarvis-McCann’s” comment she positions *having* a housekeeper as something that racialized white people do as she relates that other white people are getting a “housekeeper for their housekeeper”. The very ability to financially afford one housekeeper signals monetary privilege which both “Mr. Whitey” and “Elin Jarvis-McCann” directly relate to whiteness – they have come to see such ability as having a housekeeper as a normative performance of whiteness. Further, the power dynamics involved in “Elin Jarvis-McCann” naming and employing two housekeepers signals a sense of status and wealth that is juxtaposed to the “housekeepers” who are employed, othered, and only understood in terms of their function and their otherness. There is a strong sense of ‘us and them’ as the posts relate the house owner versus the housekeeper, where the housekeeper in the last post

becomes Othered and overtly named as such – there are even brackets with their ‘identity qualifications’ within them, as if they can only be understood through a qualifying statement of otherness and displacement. This is evident in “Elin Jarvi-McCann’s” post as the housekeepers she refers to are signalled as Other as they are not American and more specifically are named as African and Latino and must be pointed out as such, creating a nationalistic break between us (signalled American) and them (signalled as foreign). The use of foreignness recalls the history of migrant work in the United States and racializes them because of their foreignness (Moras, 2011). It also reveals the continued interconnected understandings and usages of nation to displace discourses of race (Miles & Brown, 2003). Moras (2010) explains this in terms of racialized white women’s uses of a ‘colour-blind discourse’ to speak about domestic workers using markers of language and citizenship to distance themselves from the domestic workers and position them as Other. This furthers the oppressive tactics of silencing and continuing a legacy of dominance inherent in racialization that creates the myth of whiteness as unproblematically defined through a system of performance of privileges.

The myth of whiteness as linked to light skin, privilege and dominance becomes extended as users adopt it to show how other aspects of privilege, not mentioned in the blog can be linked to whiteness. The blog creates the framework and the myth, where users come to continue to create knowledge regarding the performance of privilege *as* whiteness without recognizing the oppressive actions involved in such privilege performances that disenfranchise and silence racialized others in the process of their definition. What is troubling about this knowledge production is the enactment of the myth itself – it is innocent of the historical, social, economical, political, and cultural implications of such a racialized identity formation. It is considered ‘normal’ and even comical to link whiteness to privilege

in this framework, belittling those that are disenfranchised and Othered by it, while celebrating those who subscribe to it. Consequently the blog becomes a space of racialized white empowerment that reflects and enforces the identity performances of whiteness that are linked to “liberal, affluent, white identities and positionalities” (Alkon & McCullen, 2010, p. 939). The blog therefore becomes a space of enactment and reinforcement of the myth of whiteness where these positions, identities, and performances are favoured. This partitioning of space for the enactment and empowerment of whiteness, hiding behind the satirical blanket where critical engagement walks through the back door, reveals the power of racialized spaces and the real life consequences of such seemingly ‘innocent’ satirical engagement with racialized identity categories online. This also reveals the very real partitioning of online spaces that show the racialized nature of the web itself and its connection to larger, offline systems of racialized oppression and disenfranchisement (Gilbert 2010; Halford & Savage 2010; Mesch & Talmud, 2011; see also Crutcher & Zook, 2009; Farquharson, 2011).

Chapter Four: The Blogger/Author *Becomes* ‘Jewish’

As stated above, racialized categories are not ‘natural’ but rather must be continually re-inscribed and policed. The blog outlines a very distinct performance of ‘white’ racialized membership that many users adopt and negotiate in order to maintain its sense of fixity and their own sense of identity in relation to its boundaries. A particularly telling discussion erupts from within the comments from “#92 Book Deals” in relation to this process of continued policing and the sense of fixity of racialized identity in spite of its performative nature. In the photograph within the ‘Book Deals’ post, as described above, Christian, the now identified blogger/author, is wearing a T-shirt with a Star of David printed on the front (see *Figure 4*). The Star of David is a common symbol for Jewishness and this very loaded

sign comes to create great discussion regarding both Christian's own performance of whiteness as well as the very real implications for white racialized identity and its relationship to concepts of 'Jewishness'.

There has also been much scholarly and social contention as to whether or not Jews are considered a race both by self proclaimed Jews themselves and others, as well as where they racially fit within the legacy of white-black dichotomies of race in the Americas (Goldstein, 2002; Kaplan, 2003; Levine-Ransky, 2008; Rogoff, 1997). Rogoff (1997) explains, "despite their own sense of difference, Jews are by now firmly and indelibly on the white side of the color line" (p. 230). Despite Rogoff's (1997) assertion that Jews understand where they fit, there is an obvious questioning and debate regarding Jewish racialized positioning. Rogoff (1997) admits continued "categorical confusions" (p. 208) make the threat of Jews 'passing' for white, as seen by 'other' non-Jewish whites, of continued concern. The persistent questioning and 'otherness' of the Jewish identity is more deeply rooted in the racialized white 'consciousness' than Rogoff (1997) assumes. Whether or not this is the case, is not at issue here. What is of importance is the continued discussions of racial understanding linked to Jewish identity within the user comments because of Christian's T-shirt. Jewishness is still considered 'up for debate' and the fact that it may be considered 'white' is problematic for many users and it is the very uncertainty of Jewish identity and difference that creates anxiety around them (Itzkovitz, 1997).

It's all in the shirt: becoming 'Jewish' through performance.

Many comments relate how the T-shirt that Christian wears in the photograph within the 'Book Deals' (see *Figure 4* above) post points to the author 'being Jewish'⁵. Christian's

⁵ For example:

‘categorical confusion’ with his light skin and Star of David shirt is problematic for many users and they come to question the boundaries of whiteness and the fixity of the myth of whiteness as Jewishness encroaches into the framework. Unnamed (2008) offers an example of this questioning: “are jews [sic] *really* white people lol⁶ [sic] (see star of david [sic] on shirt)” (emphasis added). The ‘star of david on his shirt’ becomes a marker of his ‘jewishness’ pointing to the power of visual and performative signs to identity and categorize people. This proves the power of the photograph within the post as a specific site of meaning making. ‘Unnamed’ comes to see the visual cues of Christian’s light skin as potentially distinct from, and incongruous with, the shirt (read Jewishness) he wears. Clothing becomes a marker of identity categorization as important as skin pigmentation in this case.

The trouble with attempts to classify Jews as either white or non-white is the assumption that racial classification still carries an element of the biological – many of the posts speak to understanding Jewishness through biological attributes, skin colour, hair colour or through national origin – where did they ‘originally come from’ so they can be classified as ‘Jewish’⁷. What this post also reveals is the sense of disjunction between ‘Jewish’ as an identity and ‘white’ as an identity. Performances of whiteness the blog outlines are somehow incongruous with the performances of Jewishness that these users understand as “Jewish”. This reveals that performance as a register for understanding and

Chvnx (2008, March 29); Henry Blanco. (2008, March 27); theadlerian. (2008, March 26). Re: #92 Book Deals. Retrieved from <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/2008/03/26/92-book-deals/?cp=all#comments>

⁶ “lol” stands for “laugh out loud” and it is interesting to note this within ‘Unnamed’s’ post. It signals a humorous or comedic tone and consequently allows ‘Unnamed’ to be ‘off the hook’ if his/her question about Christian’s potential Jewish identity is taken ‘the wrong way’. ‘Unnamed’ is therefore adopting the same fail-safe as clander does in the satirical tone of the blog. In this instance, the comedic tone allows ‘Unnamed’ to ask a question that would potentially be considered ‘beyond the social rules’ within serious discourses.

⁷ For examples of this see:

Factman. (2008, March 27); TheAdlerian. (2008, March 26); JeffYaz. (2008, March 28); Anonymous₄. (2008, March 27). Re: #92 Book Deals. Retrieved from

<http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/2008/03/26/92-book-deals/?cp=all#comments>

defining whiteness can only go so far, as Jewishness is marked as something that is suspect for some, and completely beyond racialized white performance for others. The sense that there exists 'real' white people simultaneously creates the distinction that there are also 'fake' or 'non-real' white people who are 'passing' as white but do not somehow fit the qualifications of 'real' white. Therefore the very ability for people to be 'real' white or 'fake' white is evidence to the performative and shifting, or to use Hall's term 'floating,' nature of racialized categories of identity (Jhally, 2002). 'Fake' white and 'real' white also implies a sense of authenticity of 'real' whiteness, where it can be concretely separated from the ones who are not authentic, not 'real' in their whiteness. It also reveals the continued belief in essentialized understandings of race; that race can be boiled down to certain essential characteristics, largely biological in nature, that make up a race in its most basic criteria (Jhally, 2002) and those definitive criteria separate the 'real' from the 'fake' in racial categorization. The positionality of whiteness within the blog is only 'real' if the other registers of whiteness, biology and dominance, are also present. With essentialized understanding of Jewishness as ambiguous at best, and completely Othered and disenfranchising at worst, the other registers of biological light skin and dominance fall away from this positional understanding of whiteness within the blog. A comment by "Luke Jackson" (2008, March 26) emphasizes this distinction: "Excuse me, jews [sic] are not *real white people*. I don't know whether or not to trust your site anymore" (emphasis added). Once again, this post shows the ideological understanding that there is such thing as "real" and then by contrast "fake" white people. This points to the repeated sense of whiteness as a category of entitlement and a dis-ease or discomfort with the potential for people to inhabit multiple racialized categories, to 'pass' for other 'races'. This discomfort is related to a yearning to fix and control social categories as this fixation allows for an ascription of

contextual understanding: if you are white it means you have a specific history, ancestry, cultural identity, certain ideologies, and as the blog reveals, certain performative traits that relate to your fixed racialized identity. The fluidity of race as a performative identity is unsettling as it makes the ascription of contextual understanding more difficult. Furthermore, “Luke Jackson” point to the authored nature of the site (if only mockingly) as a site of authority through his comment about not trusting the site after the ‘revealing’ of Christian’s potential Jewish identity. This small admission also points to a sense that performances of whiteness and of Jewishness cannot, for “Unnamed” and for “Luke Jackson,” work together, but are separate and distinctive performances linked through the other registers of racialized understanding to distinctive identity formations and positionalities. The fact that Christian attempted to perform these two ‘separate’ identity formations together, in one person, is for “Luke Jackson” and somewhat for “Unnamed,” a sort of deception. It has somehow troubled his confidence in the ‘truth’ and authority of the site by opening Christian’s racialized identity as something other than a replica of the whiteness the blog outlines and a positionality of whiteness that “Luke Jackson” understands. This reveals an important shift in the user’s understanding of whiteness as identity categories and the prominence of the differing registers within those definitions.

The ‘wrong kind of white’: Jewishness and ‘otherness.’

Many comments maintain that the notion that Christian might be Jewish or that his performance of whiteness might be related to Jewishness, position him as ‘Other’ and therefore a different, and ‘wrong kind of white’ in relation to the blog’s positional definition of whiteness⁸. As one user comments: “There you have it. Christian is definitely outed [sic]

⁸ For examples see:

Anonymous(3). (2008, March 28); Cargill. (2008, March 28); Henry Blanco. (2008, March 27);

as the ‘wrong kind of White’” (Maimonides, 2008, March 28). The sense that the debate is now closed – “there you have it” – relates to the continued need to fix, control and police racialized boundaries. This closing and fixing maintains the ‘purity’ and ‘truth’ of the whiteness myth by policing out the ‘other’ whites, and meanings of whiteness, which threaten its fixity. This ‘wrong’ kind of white is separated from the ‘real’ and ‘right’ kind where the threat of ‘others’ passing as these right kinds of white is always at issue. Passing as “white” then involves varying degrees of whiteness where light skin is related to a position where dominance and privilege are priorities, and the more these performances of dominance are enacted, the higher within the category of whiteness one can potentially inhabit. Because of this performative aspect, ‘passing’ is always a threat, and when discovered must be controlled and policed out of the white in-group. ‘Other whites’ are not conceived as positively in their positionality as they lack elements within the different registers of whiteness to be considered ‘proper’ or ‘right kinds’ of white. This ‘wrong kind’ of white continues to be understood through the registers of white racial formation. It is however a performance of ‘otherness,’ a questionable biological heredity and/or a lack of dominance that discursively separates the ‘wrong kind’ of white from the whiteness the blog exemplifies. Whiteness here reveals its own internal hierarchy, where whiteness as related to privilege is at the apex with other identity formations linked to whiteness considered inferior, ‘not real’ even, completely separating and policing the powerful boundaries of this category. This fervent policing of the myth of whiteness reveals that there is also a sense of the fragility of such racialized categories as they require continued encouragement in their enaction through performance and naming and also continued boundary policing to ensure

NK. (2008, March 26). Re: #92 Book Deals. Retrieved from <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/2008/03/26/92-book-deals/?cp=all#comments>

the sense of fixity between ‘us’ and ‘them;’ ‘real white’ and ‘other white’ as well as all other racialized categories. This also relates to the strong grounding definitions of whiteness have in dominance, as they require ‘other,’ considered lesser, ‘kinds’ to define themselves and maintain their understandings of whiteness as unproblematically privileged. Jews are Othered from the blog’s understanding of white racialized identity because their biological heredity is suspect, and many of their historic performances are related, not to dominance, but being dominated, controlled and disenfranchised. It is for this reason that Christian’s performance of Jewishness is questioned and creates speculation among many of the users.

Furthermore, ‘the wrong kind of white’ is used discursively to distance ‘real’ white from ‘other’ white and maintain the borders of the more positively understood conceptions of whiteness. Discursive distance is an important tactic in communicative acts as it mimics the social distancing that is enforced through language. The discursive move is one of dominance as ‘the wrong kind’ of white signaled by users implies that they are, by default the ‘right kind’ and have the power to say who is and is not part of their ‘group’. Therefore the register of dominance is continually enacted in a discursive manner in these comments in order to police and control those considered racialized ‘others,’ white and non-white alike. “Hugh Manrace” (2008, April 1) in his comment reveals how performance of ‘other white’ is as important to maintaining ‘real’ white as privileged performances of whiteness discussed in the section above: “When your book arrives at Walmart, make sure they put it right next to the Slim-Jims so the ‘wrong kind of white people’ can find it!”. “Wrong kind of white” is positioned performatively here as people who shop at Walmart – which signifies lower income households as the superstore is marketed for its value and low prices, not necessarily on its superior products and environmental initiatives like Whole Foods, which is signalled as the ‘right’ kind of white’s place to buy groceries (Clander, 2008, February 3). Walmart in

this comment acts as a discursively loaded sign of differentiation between ‘real/right kind’ of white and ‘other/wrong kind’ of white. It acts as a sign for *lack* of monetary privilege and social standing that the blog describes therefore creating a concrete boundary of ‘us’ (right white people) and ‘them’ (wrong, ‘other’ whites). “Hugh Manrace” also uses ‘Slim-Jims’ to signal the Otherness of the wrong kind of white performance. Slim-Jims can refer to both the beef jerky brand, which portray a ‘man’s man’ advertising, using many World Wrestling Entertainment celebrities for their campaigns (‘slim jim’, n.d.), or the colloquial name for a piece of metal used to steal cars. The former explanation is more likely, but both potential meanings relate to ‘lower brow’, and even potentially deviant (in the second sense) performances of whiteness. ‘Wrong white’ or ‘other white’ comes to be together within a sub-category of whiteness where all less desirable performances attributed to whiteness are positioned. This is where the stereotypic ‘red neck’ or ‘Southern hick’ would be located in this racialized hierarchy. Within the ‘redneck’ positionality of whiteness the registers are differently balance, where biology becomes more prominent, and performance and dominance occupy lower positions. The formation of this particular type of whiteness is not within the scope of this paper, but what its conception reveals is the ways the registers are employed to create different, distinct understandings of whiteness that correlate to socially understood essentialized identity formations. What these comments reveal then, is important policing of the myth of whiteness and a discursive distancing from understandings of Jewishness as a ‘racial’ category. This harkens back to the biological hierarchy of natural ‘kinds’ where people’s biological organization was dependant on the assumption that there were distinct species or ‘kinds’ of humans that could be classified hierarchically, with whites occupying the place of power over ‘other’ racialized kinds (Goldberg, 1993).

“Hugh Manrace’s” comment is just one example of the use of ‘wrong kind of white’ to create the clear distinction between the performance of whiteness in the blog, and performances that are not within the framework of this racialized identity position and are therefore ‘othered’⁹. It is by explaining the particulars of the performances of ‘other’ white that ‘real’ white is able to be distinguished and kept intact as a distinct, more refined, understanding of racialized whiteness. ‘Other white’ comes to embody ‘light skin’ but has performative characteristics that do not necessarily link to formations of whiteness as the blog describes them: light skin *and* living the legacy of dominance and privilege. Therefore all subject positions or potential identities that are not continuing or reinforcing the myth as containing strong, unquestioned links to all three registers, are considered inferior and Othered. Furthermore all performances not within this framework are ostracized (through humour most of the time, like described in the analysis of “Coffee”) and excluded from this positionality of whiteness, are controlled as Other and marked as ‘wrong’. By marking them as wrong, the dominance of this positioning is made clear.

What kind of other white is he anyway?: creating ‘jewified white.’

In users’ ambitions to find the ‘truth’ of Christian’s racialized identity, he is interviewed by the magazine HEEB where the author/blogger overtly states he is not Jewish: “I have a Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto shirt on in this picture [from the post] and a lot of people debated whether or not I was Jewish because of the shirt. But I’m not, I got it at a thrift store, of course. I guess that when people found out my name was Christian... probably not so Jewish” (Rebecca & Lander, 2008). “Eddie Blinder” (2008,

⁹ For more examples of ‘other white’ performances see: Astonished Redneck. (2008, March 26); Cargill. (2008, March 28); lols. (2008, March 26); praxenakis. (2008, March 26); scottmercer. (2008, March 26). Re: #92 Book Deals. Retrieved from <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/2008/03/26/92-book-deals/?cp=all#comments>

March 27) cites this interview on the comment thread attempting to end the debate and ‘fix’ Christian racialized positioning, but it does not necessarily end all discussion of the boundaries of whiteness or where Christian’s identity and Jewishness might all fit together. Christian’s questioned positioning continues to spark commentary from many users as one user responds: “I think he wants to be [real white], along with some other ‘wrong kind’ of White people” (Anonymous₂, 2008, April 6). This comment relates the sense of superiority of the myth of whiteness in relation to dominance and privilege. Others *want* to be ‘real white’ as it is defined in the blog, as there is a common-sense understanding that it is the most valued and desirable ‘kind’ of white. This once again relates the sense of hierarchy within racialized whiteness. It also reveals that Christian’s racialized identity continues to act as a catalyst for significant debates about the boundaries and hierarchies of racialized whiteness. In the comment above, Christian is positioned as having an identity that is not ‘real’ white or ‘the wrong’ white, but something different again. Several users identify this ‘in-between’ or further Othered position as ‘jewified white’. It becomes a sort of sub-category of whiteness that continues to keep users’ understanding of ‘real white’ as it is described in the blog as separate and distinct from ‘other white’ and, in this case, ‘jewified white’. A comment posted by “Henry Blanco” reveals an overt and forceful distancing of whiteness from Jewishness: “This little prick in the picture is not the definition of ‘White’. Far from it. Look at the photo again. he’s a jewified weasel” (Henry Blanco, 2008, March 27, quotations in original). Henry Blanco shows how there is a common-sense understanding that there is an essentialized ‘definition’ of whiteness which is very performative in nature – Henry Blanco points to the photo of Christian as the reason why he is “not the definition of ‘White’”. The comment also reveals a sense of whiteness becoming inhabited or encroached upon by Jewishness with the suffix ‘ified,’ which relates the sense of whiteness being *made*

Jewish. In its very meaning, this grammatical suffix displays the process of racialization. Whiteness becomes related to Jewishness because, in this instance, a shirt with a Jewish symbol on it worn by a blogger/author also reveals the attributes of 'real' whiteness. 'Jewified white' is a solution to the disjunction and continued debate of how whiteness and Jewishness can function together in one identity – Christian. The weasel stereotype employed in the quote relates to thieving and trickery, which furthers the sense that some users feel as though they have been somehow tricked to believe in and follow the myth of whiteness of the blog. Henry Blanco makes it clear that Christian is “not the definition of white” but rather a “jewified weasel” because of the photograph. Performance in this case, and the power of racialized signs to create new meanings, is revealed here as again it is the visual cue, the performance of identity through visual markers that leads to racialization of jewified whiteness and by 'othering' whiteness as well. It is a means of controlling identity categories, both white and 'other' alike. The comment is especially racist as Henry Blanco finds the 'passing,' or the threat of Christian's passing, to be an action that is less than human – a weasel. Jews become, in this comment racialized as less than human, where whiteness continues to be understood as something that enacts the dominance to name others in such racist terms with little to no backlash. Other more overt racist comments and other users' receptions to them will be discussed further below.

By positioning Christian – shirt and all – as 'jewified white' it keeps 'real white' separate and 'pure' from 'other kinds' of whiteness that are not furthering the project of white dominance and 'innocent' privilege the blog describes and promotes. For some users, however, Christian's questionable or 'other white' identity creates a new understanding of the blog within a Jewish framework. “Cargill's” comment describes this point: “I called it from the beginning. This site was always about jewified little whites, and now it's right there

for all to see. A picture is worth 1,000 words. Unreal. If that's "White", then what a joke" (Cargill, 2008, March 27). Cargill's comment reveals a questioning of whiteness because of the presence of Jewishness from Christian's picture. Barthes (1977) theory of the power of the photograph to make meaning becomes evident. The picture reveals to "Cargill" the 'truth' about Christian and his racialized identity, "it's right there for all to see". It is as though it completely explains something about the site it did not reveal before. There is a sense of feeling deceived, and disappointment - "then what a joke" - that the blog is no longer, for "Cargill", about 'real' whites, but has become tainted by Otherness. This is a very racist remark as the Otherness, or potential Otherness, no longer makes the blog important or interesting, but is brushed off as a joke, as if the performance of Otherness is not as real or significant as the performance of whiteness. "Cargill's" comment also relates to "Luke Jackson's" comment described above and coming to question the very 'truth' and authority of the blog based on the other racialized identity Christian is potentially exhibiting. "Cargill" attempts to recover his white dominance by stating that the blog "was always about jewified little whites" as if the secretive intentions of the 'lesser' Jew who is attempting to pass for white has now been exposed and "Cargill" can claim s/he knew it all along - retaining his/her sense of superiority over such 'trickery'. Whiteness is given more discursive weight in "Cargill's" comment as well as the 'jewified white' is further distanced and made to seem less significant with the addition of "little". The whiteness here is both tainted by Jewishness and made diminutive in comparison to 'real white'. The strong sense of discursive distancing of 'real white' and Other white once again shows the anxiety some users feel over the instability of racialized categories, especially the dominance of whiteness within the racial hierarchy. Further, it shows the instability of Jewish as a category of identity, as its very

instability harkens back to the legacy of anti-Semitism still brooding in the United States (Levine-Ransky, 2008).

“matthew mcconaughey” (2008, March 27) also speaks to this sense of controlling and categorizing whiteness as well as the questioning and anxiety over the uncertainty of whiteness: “These jews are flocking to SJWPL. ‘Stuff jewified white people like’. If this site is about “Whites” then why was the first interview done with a Hebrew magazine? Huh?”. “matthew mcconaughey” comes to question the legitimacy of the blog’s definitions of white as the picture, and the post from “Eddie Binder” (2008, March 27), reveal that sense of the mixing of whiteness and Jewishness that is incongruent with the myth of whiteness the blog promotes as well as the fixity and control of white racial membership the blog’s framework promotes. “matthew mcconaughey” shows the sense of anxiety as “jews are flocking” to the site changes the name of the blog in his post to reflect the feeling of a process of whiteness being taken over, ‘jewified,’ by Jewish identity.

Whiteness becomes a delicate category of continued maintenance where users repetitively reinforce the boundaries of the white myth and framework of the blog, and consequently Other all performances that do not follow the myth of whiteness. “matthew mcconaughey’s” tone of anxiety over Jewish identities “flocking” to the blog as well as the fact that a “Hebrew magazine” was the first to interview the author, as opposed to another magazine that would be coded as white, uncovers the insecurity of the boundaries of racialized white identities and the fear of the boundaries becoming burdened by other identities, like Jewishness. It reveals the continued common-sense ideology that racial categories are essential, are fixed – a-historical, a-political, ‘innocent’ to use Barthes (1977) term - and are easily understood, which can all come into question when identities become overlapped. Like “Luke Jackson” and “Cargill” before him, “matthew macconoughey” feels

an anxiety and threatening of his definitions of white racialized identity as a biologically rooted and fixed category of dominance. With Jews “flocking” to the blog, the blog no longer has the sense of ‘only being about whites’ but has now the potential to be about ‘other whites’, which is not for these users something which white racial membership should include. Whiteness here is about controlling an understanding of a racial category that is exclusive, that is oppressive, and that is very rooted in racist discourses of otherness.

Christian’s questioned identity therefore sparks so much debate and discussion in the blog because it acts as a moment of confrontation of this common-sense ideology of racial categories. The anxiety “matthew mcconaughey” shows in his post is reminiscent of this confrontation, this troubling of everyday understandings of race. It was *because* of the sign of the Star of David as well as the performance of Christian as related to the myth of whiteness that such discussions arose. What it also shows, however, is the great lengths some users go through to solidify, to fix and to maintain the categories of race they ‘understand’ to be ‘true’ – like the myth of whiteness. These users rely on tactics of othering, belittling, and ridiculing (all of which are quite racist) to reinstate the myth of whiteness, to other uncertainty in racial identities, and re-fix the hierarchies of race whiteness requires maintaining itself. The knowledges these users have produced from this discussion are not about the openness of racialized definitions, but the threat of such openness in light of the common-sense of whiteness being a fixed category related to light skin and performances of privilege in North American society. Furthermore, the definitions and understandings of whiteness within these users’ posts uncover another formation of white racialized identity that relies more strongly on the registers of dominance and biology than performance. Performance is secondary to maintaining dominance and purity within this positionality of whiteness. Therefore although users like “Cargill,” “Henry Blanco,” and “Luke Jackson”

visit and participate in the blog because it is about “white people” their conceptions of white racialized identity are not as performative as the blog’s and rely on a different formation of the registers of whiteness to make meaning of what it means to be “white”.

Using ‘real’ white as dominance to fix racialized ‘other white.’

As has been shown above, the framework of the blog, which sets up a place for racialized discussion and the promotion of racialized whiteness as privilege, allows such a racialized space to be used not only for identity construction and meaning making about concepts of race, but also for the promotion and dissemination of racist discourses like anti-Semitism. What becomes evident from this is also how racist discourses enforce the dominance of whiteness and the oppression of racialized others. By continually positioning all identities and races that are not promoting whiteness as unquestioned privilege as ‘other’ and continually speaking of them in negative terms, the power of and ‘purity’ of whiteness remains intact. This negative language and positioning of dominance is strongly evident in the following comment by “Anonymous₁”, who is once again policing the boundaries between ‘real white’ and ‘jewified’ or ‘other’ white: “No self-respecting White person would wear a shirt like that. He’s taken to the liberal jewish [sic] world this blog describes so well. doesn’t [sic] surprise whites one bit to see him in that shirt. Actually it’s quite predictable” (2008, March 27). “Anonymous₁” uses a tone of ridicule masked within the same satirical nature of blog to reinforce the dominance of whiteness. Michael Billig (2001) in an article about racist jokes on self-proclaimed KKK websites explains the strong link between humour and hatred, which is often downplayed in studies of humour. Billig (2001) points to the disturbing use of humour as a means to discuss and continue discourse of “hatred” as overt racist views are now considered taboo in serious discourses. Using ‘humour’ to frame racialized and racist talk and text, the social codes against this type of talk and text are

evaded. Therefore the racialized framework of the blog and its use of humour and satire to speak about racialized identity paired with the continuous re-presentation of white identity as related to assumed and unquestioned privilege creates the ideal circumstances for racist satire and joking in order to reinforce white dominance in the face of ‘other’ racialized categories. Specifically, the user positions himself/herself as white: “doesn’t surprise whites one bit” against ‘other’ whites which s/he refers to as part of the other “liberal jewish [sic] world”. The user is positioned as an authority figure of understanding white identity against other white categories that are considered lesser by relating them to the “liberal jewish [sic] world”. The blog comes to describe not white people for “Anonymous₁”, but more specifically “the liberal Jewish world” as if the concept of whiteness for “Anonymous₁” is becoming not a fixed category dominated by the register of skin colour, but comes to reveal its inter-contextual nature in relations of other sites and registers of identity formation, like political understandings and leanings as well as concepts of culture and religion. This is problematic for “Anonymous₁” and cause for ridicule because it is disrupting and encroaching on his or her understanding of whiteness as fixed and unproblematically linked predominantly to the biological, but also very importantly to dominance. This encroachment or unfixing of racialized categories threatens the ‘truth’ of the whiteness myth and reveals the fear of people passing as dominant whites within a racialized white dominant society – the fear is of losing this dominance to the ‘other’ – to the ‘Jewified whites’ or the other whites or even the ‘other races’. The tone within the comments shows anxiety, disappointment and even anger, towards Jewish identity and its threat to white racialized dominance exposing the strength and prevalence of anti-Semitic and racist discourses that are still alive and well in popular talk and text. Discursively, it is also interesting to note that *white* is capitalized whereas *jewish* is not. White is therefore given linguistic as well as

discursive authority, where 'jewish' is linguistically belittled by making it devoid of its proper noun status. In a framework that does not allow for direct tonal inflection, this subtle, but powerful distinction of proper nouns allows "Anonymous₁" to belittle 'Jewishness' and promote whiteness. Furthermore, the user's use of sarcastic "no self-respecting White person" to distance, ridicule, and other Christian's Jewish associative identity from his/her understanding of white is significant. As explained above, ridicule is used to expose a disruption of social order. In this case, "Anonymous₁" is pointing out that Christian's association of white to 'Jewishness' is beyond the social code. In this case, Christian's performative understanding of racialized whiteness is not the same as "Anonymous₁" understanding of racialized whiteness and therefore must be marked as such. "Anonymous₁" uses ridicule to reveal both his/her own definition of whiteness and that Christian's performance of whiteness is beyond the social order – it betrays 'real white'. This divergence from this racial order is further controlled and separated from whiteness as "Anonymous₁" finds the entire blog to now represent the 'liberal Jewish world' as opposed to 'white people' as it claims. Once again it reveals the need for continued boundary control, to the point of overt racist remarks. This type of ridicule distances and contains Jewishness as relate to whiteness as a form of racial purity that must be kept as such. This type of understanding of race is strongly reminiscent of White supremacist ideologies. The entire framework of the blog is re-interpreted on the grounds of this Jewish-white relationship, which "Anonymous₁" dismisses as 'quite predictable' as if it were a common occurrence for racialized whiteness to be taken over or tainted by Jewishness. Consequently whiteness here is understood as a 'pure' race that must be kept free of other considered lesser races, like Jews, and is profoundly rooted in biological and ancestral registers, which are essentialist and absolute.

“Anonymous₁’s” admission that Christian’s Jewishness is quite “predictable” further enforces the sense that whiteness is always under threat of other ‘lesser’ races’ infiltration.

These comments show that whiteness is not simply about the ‘innocent’ performance of privilege, but is also very much about dominance and definition through the oppression of racialized others. Leonardo’s (2004) explains that whiteness is not simply a matter of privilege, but must be understood to work beyond the personal instances of privilege to the larger structures of dominance that allows privilege to take place. The blog acts as a site of exhibiting and even promoting those systems of dominance as white privilege is celebrated, racialized others are controlled and silenced, and racialized categories are policed and fixed in a hierarchy of racialized white power.

What is especially troubling about this is the utter lack of other users combating or contesting these views. Users like “Cargill” and “Henry Blanco” are very regular posters in “Book Deals” and therefore make their voices and views dominant within the conversations analyzed here. Most users combat or enter into the discussion by continuing to discuss Christian’s racialization – is he white, Jewish or ‘other/both’ or using humourous ridicule to belittle comments¹⁰. There were no comments in response “Anonymous₁,” which shows that users either feel that s/he is correct, or that they want to ignore his comments. With either option, his/her comment remains part of the discourse and by not being accepted or denied continues its presence in discourses of race and whiteness. A post by “I spy...” (2008, March 21), which is a reply to “Henry Blanco’s” comment discussed above, shows a common example: “I do believe Henry Blanco is messing with us, and that his posting is satire”. “I

¹⁰ In response to Henry Blanco’s comment above, two users commented using humourous ridicule where ‘I spy...’s comment was the last of the thread: ted. (2008, March 27); Hardcastle. (2008, March 27). Re: #92 Book Deals. Retrieved from <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/2008/03/26/92-book-deals/?cp=all#comments>

spy's" response makes "Henry Blanco's" comment appear less poignant and significant by allowing it to be considered humorous satire. It allows for a discursive distancing, which in turn sanctions such racist expressions, letting them 'off the hook,' as they are considered humour and therefore lacking the weight of serious discourse. The trouble with the utter lack of serious sites of resistance is that these racist and anti-Semitic discourses continue to be circulated and perpetuated within popular culture. Further, it belittles the real and enduring affects of such discourse on the people it describes: Jewish identities, racialized "other" identities, identities that pass as white and other.

Seeing the "race": potential sites of resistance.

It is important to note where sites of resistance do occur in serious ways. While many comments continue to create white racialized identity as something that is unproblematically both dominant and privileged, there are users who are very aware of the construction of racialized categories, even their own whiteness, or non-whiteness. A comment by "Deacon Blue" is a particularly hopeful one:

Well, Christian, bet you didn't expect to cause quite so much comment on the so-called evils of the Jews. You have an every so slight curl to your hair, you wear a shirt with a Star of David, and bam!...you're either an Jewish evil genius or an evil sympathizer. God, some people have hateful attitudes. I swear some of them make Hitler look like the model of mental health, and that's hard to do. Anyway, I guess I called it right a whole hell of a lot of posts ago when I predicted people wouldn't let the Jewish thing go. *sigh* I had hoped my comment would end up being a joke, NOT the truth... (2008, March 28).

"Deacon Blue" is aware of the power of performance in determining racialized identity by pointing to the very essentialized performative and biological registers of Jewishness – curly

hair, the Star of David. What “Deacon Blue” is also able to point out is the effects of these attributions as s/he links other users behaviours to Hitler through their negative associations to Jewish identity. The comment is also striking because “Deacon Blue” is using humourous ridicule to point out another social rule – that of racist understandings. S/He links the racist attitudes of some user comments to Hitler as well as uncovers the very simple use of essentialisms that led to such racist claims: “a curl in your hair and a shirt with a Star of David *make you a Jew*”. In this sense “Deacon Blue” is able to switch the dynamics of the social code to bring light not to the threat and negativity of Jewishness encroachment on whiteness, but rather users’ assumptions about the essentialized understandings of Jewishness and their own racist reactions to this essentialized understanding. Christian was considered Jewish because of a Star of David on his T-shirt, not because he *said* he was Jewish, but because he visually represented an essentialized sign of Jewish identity.

What this conversation between many different users reveals is the real and significant effects of essentialized understandings of social categories. Whiteness as well as Jewishness were essentialized and understood through the representation of some of these essentialized characteristics through Christian. The blog’s framework acted as the foundation of making meaning and interpreting racialized understanding through the representation of attributes that are seen to be essentially linked to whiteness (biologically light skin, dominance, and performances of privilege because of a system of the dominance it promotes) consequently paving the way for an understanding of Jewishness through the same framework. Because common-sense understandings of racial categories represents them as fixed and determinable categories of difference, Christian’s representation of multiple identity categories through essentialized signs of whiteness and Jewishness was the trigger moment to reveal the troubling nature of this common-sense understanding. Attempts to

control and re-fix identity categories opened spaces for racialized discussions of difference that promoted racist and anti-Semitic discourses that relied on those very essentialized understandings and signs for their enactment. Therefore the seemingly innocent use of essential racialized understandings of whiteness in “Stuff White People Like” provided the framework and the discourse structure that opened avenues for anti-Semitic and racist discourses to adopt the framework and become empowered in this online forum.

Conclusion

One of the main goals of this work was to expose and trouble the everyday and common-sense understandings of race and whiteness as they appear in popular culture settings. The blog “Stuff White People Like” became a case study for analyzing these discursive categories in a racialized, real-life setting. The obvious racialized framework allowed for an ideal case for studying a popular culture site of everyday discussions of race and racism. The user comments become a unique way to investigate and understand how discourses of racialized identity and understanding are circulating online.

Users react to and use the blog as a site of truth and knowledge of race as well as a site of maintenance and legitimation for privileged identities but also a place for potential questioning and troubling of these ‘truths’ and ‘knowledges’. What this essay and its discussions reveal is that people use social media and the Internet to engage discussions of race, racialization and identity in a real and significant way. They also show the power of visual and discursive cues in the performance of racial categories and the power of ridicule in the maintenance of these categories. Furthermore, the discussions uncover how the framework of the blog has a significant influence about how knowledge of race and racism is perpetuated and produced within the discussion. It was the very strength of the myth of whiteness as an ‘innocent’ performance of privilege that enabled discussions of whiteness,

‘other white’ and ‘jewified white’ to occur and circulate. These discussions relate that whiteness is constructed, managed, performed, and perpetuated through understandings of legitimate privilege, of unquestioned dominance, and of ‘scientific’ biological grounding. Therefore the blog reveals the power of its racialized discursive structure to act as a framework for knowledge production and understanding of race as a category of essentialized representation and identity. The blog lists attributes, practices and performances as essential to a racialized identity: to whiteness, and doing so creates a knowledge of whiteness that becomes myth, it becomes ‘true’.

The blog also becomes a site of contest of multiple and often overlapping understandings and knowledges of race and whiteness. Whiteness comes to occupy three main definitions that are employed within the blog itself as well as many of the user comments. Whiteness is first and foremost a race that is still largely determined through visual cues of biological ancestry: light skin. This is within the very foundations of the blog itself – “*Stuff White People Like*”, showing repeated photographs of light skinned people to enforce this biological foundation. This is taken up within the users comments to varying degrees. For some users, this register of understanding race and whiteness is of the greatest importance, where heritage, bloodline and purity are vital to understanding and defining “race” and “white”. This stance is revealed within the discussions of Christian as potentially Jewish, as many users came to define their understandings of race in terms of scientific types where there were absolutes of each type, and contamination was a great concern. Further for these types of definitions, ‘passing’ as white, as ‘Jewish Christian’ might have, is considered a significant break in the racial order and is a cause of great angst. Otherness in this type of understanding is racially inferior, must be controlled and policed and must be kept clear of more superior races (like whiteness in this sense). The comment by “Anonymous₁” speaks to

this sense of the power racial hierarchy and the threat of people who do not abide by its rules. Such racial understandings are quite racist and it is troubling to note the lack of resistance to such oppressive discourses.

The second register of whiteness that the blog and the user comments reveals is more of an understanding of whiteness as a performance. Whiteness becomes related to a culture of elites and linked very much to the project of white privilege. It is this understanding of whiteness that the blog itself puts forward most. Within this understanding of whiteness, the identity can be copied and re-appropriated. Users can claim their adherence to “white” as a racial category through their performances of the blog’s claims. This understanding of whiteness relates to Henry and Tator’s (2007) explanation of democratic racism where democratic ideologies as well as histories of privilege and dominance work in perpetual conflict. Whiteness is cultural, constructed, and perpetuated within this understanding, but it also holds blindly to histories of colonialism, dominance and oppression of people racialized as other to maintain itself. This blind enactment of privilege is the problematic foundation of the whiteness myth. It is a myth because the history and the continued use of dominating and oppressive tactics to enable white performance of privilege to become the defining characteristics of whiteness is washed away, veiled within white consciousness.

It is however within this understanding of whiteness as performance where race holds its most anti-racist potential, as construction and performance are favoured, making it easier for people to occupy negotiated and multiple racialized identities through their performances. If performance of racial attributes becomes known and understood as not ‘fixed’ but rather changing, evolving and part of identity in a way that is moldable – where people can become and un-become white, can ‘pass’ as ‘white’ - the categories of race become more overtly

those ‘in quotations’ categories, where their reality is known and understood as created, performed and suspect, rather than fixed, essentialized, and eternal.

The final understanding of whiteness that the blog and the user comments reveal is that whiteness is oppressive and within the realm of the dominant. This understanding lurks within both other understandings of whiteness explained above, but also operates as its own distinct understanding of race and racial hierarchy. Within biological and performative understandings of whiteness, each relies on positions of dominance or the legacy of dominance to enforce and police its existence. Farmers’ markets for example, are only linked to whiteness if they unquestioningly accept the oppression and racialized others who were excluded and pushed off the land that whites now farm, and that employ racialized others that are forgotten and silenced in favour of the white farmer (Alkon & McCullen, 2010). It is this understanding of whiteness that polices the boundaries and controls the in- and out-group understandings of what is and is not white. It silences those who are oppressed to maintain itself.

Race is enacted within all three understandings of whiteness as the blog and the comments show. Race is about biological differentiation, still troublingly related to skin colour and ancestry. Race is also about performance of culturally specific attributes that are linked to specific races through differing levels of dominance and oppression. Race is finally and most obviously a very powerful element in positioning social identity. All three registers of whiteness are related and not without overlap. Most often they are working together, uniquely within every comment and for every level of understanding. Each register is used for distinctive contexts and to varying degrees. It is the relative prominence of each register within different contexts of racialized white identity formations that reveal the different positionalities of whiteness. This creates three major positionalities of whiteness where each

register is always at play but is given different weights of prominence, one in particular having more power than the rest in each position. Therefore there is a positionality of whiteness that is predominantly concerned with the biological register of white identity, but employs various levels of the other registers as well within its articulation. There is also then a positionality of whiteness that favours performance, and also one which employs mostly dominance in its articulation. It is these three major understandings of whiteness that come to dominate discussions and frameworks within the blog and are perpetuated as the knowledges that are important for popular cultural ideologies and myth of whiteness.

The satire of the blog acts as a separate layer through which all three knowledges of race and whiteness are discussed and negotiated. Satire acts as a buffer to allow both racist discourses to seem less harmful and less what they are – racist. It also allows critical discourses that attempt to combat or question essentialist understandings of race to be downplayed and policed out of discussions. Though satire has the power to allow discussions to occur that may seem difficult, such as confronting white dominance and performances of privilege, in its very allowance of these discussions, it also allows them to be denied, ignored and belittled. The satire within the blog, and as taken up within the user comments, makes some discourses difficult to pick apart as the level of seriousness within the discourse is not completely understood. The effects of these discourses are however, of the greatest importance. Discourses that allow overt racist expressions to go unquestioned must always be, for antiracism, opened, called out and recognized, as they are racist, even if they are ‘supposed to be a joke’.

Further Research

There are many other interconnected elements of the user comments as well as many other blog posts that could not be adequately addressed within the scope of this paper. Many

of these elements are also important to consider when addressing the knowledge production that is occurring within the blog and the important discussions surrounding how people are speaking about and understanding racialized identity politics in popular culture. Concepts of how some of the users actually do come to question and act against the assumptions of the blog are only briefly discussed and have the potential to illuminate how some important discourses can help shape new and important understandings and knowledges of race and racism for the future. Also, many other occasions of how for instance, some users use historic discussions of reverse racism, colour blindness, and multiculturalism to inform their comments are further critical interconnected discussions that are crucial to a full analysis of the blog and its relationship and ‘conversation’ with the commentators. Further, the place and power of satire and humour within these discussions is always at play and is much more insidious than the scope of this paper could address.

The blog posts “#1 Coffee” and “# 92 Book Deals” that are analyzed within this paper offer just two moments of discussion of the blog and its framework where many other significant moments within later conversations or other posts may prove equally important and revealing to discussions of race and racism. As a case study, this scratches the surface of the large and continuous dynamics of racialized discourses within popular culture and the Western world. With this, it is important to note that the blog is itself very contextualized within political, geographical and historical contexts that favour certain ideas and voices, while limiting others. The very fact that the blog is online and in English limits the voices that would potentially participate in the blog’s discussions, which cannot be forgotten or ignored.

What this essay and its discussions reveal is that people online do use social media and the Internet to engage discussions of race, racialization and identity in real and

significant ways. These discussions open up interesting possibilities for understanding the knowledge production process within these comments and this analysis can be used as a foundation for further understanding of these important subjects and the continued work of antiracist education and the study of the politics of culture in general.

New directions: Beyond the blog

The power of the blog to create knowledge about race and racism is not only evident in the discussions within the blog itself, but also in its popularity to structure discussions of identity, even racialized identity elsewhere on the Internet. Other social/cultural groups have now appropriated the discursive structure of “Stuff White People Like”. This is an important turning point in the knowledge production process as the discursive structure of using essentialized performative characteristics to understand a seemingly ‘simple’ racialized category have proven, through this analysis, to be anything but ‘simple’ and more importantly very significant in their effects. This re-appropriation of the discourse structure within the blog has allowed for an opening of discussions surrounding essentialized performances of identity, whether it is gender, race, sexual orientation, or even nation as some of the examples currently online include “Stuff educated black people like”¹¹, “Stuff Asian people like”¹², “Stuff ethnic people like”¹³, “Stuff black people like”¹⁴, “Stuff lesbians like”¹⁵, and even “Stuff Dutch people like”¹⁶. There emerges a fine line between making these sites and their discussions anti-essentialist, as people can either claim or create their own understanding of their identity, but in doing so the sites also make essentialized

¹¹ www.educatedblackpeople.org

¹² www.asian-central.com

¹³ www.stuffethnicpeoplelike.com

¹⁴ www.stuffblackpeoplelikealso.wordpress.com

¹⁵ www.stufflesbianslike.blogspot.com

¹⁶ www.stuffdutchpeoplelike.com

understandings of these identity formations front and center. These specific examples, however, have the ability to create a sense of community for some people who are disenfranchised by their representative identity and therefore the sites act as a celebration of that representation, rather than a site of critique and ridicule. It would be another project altogether to investigate how the discursive framework is being appropriated within these sites, but the power of the discursive framework for understanding identity categories cannot be ignored. It encourages people to align themselves with the outlined characteristics of race, of sexuality, of nation, in order to understand their own position within these identity formations. These sites do not break down essentialized understandings of these identity formations and their performances, but rather encourage people who read and react to them to see them as central to their personal understandings of their identity in relation to these categories. Is a person not as “Dutch” if he or she does not perform many of the attributes listed on the site? Or conversely as has been made evident in the blog comments for “Stuff White People Like”, is a person not as “white”, or the wrong kind of white or Other white if he or she does not like the things on the site’s list? This discursive structure allows little room for interconnected or fluid understandings and knowledges of identity, but rather promotes the re-inscription and celebration of identities related to essential ones.

Further possibilities: The blog and Antiracist Education

The more significant question becomes can this discourse structure become anti-essentialist? Can “Stuff White People Like” be itself anti-racist? There is no simple way of making such a discourse structure anti-racist. Part of the reason for its fame was its satirical genre. The satire, as discussed previously, allows for more critical comment, but also allows for people to keep a same critical distance from the serious undercurrent of the comments in general. Critical engagement and thought is a requirement for anti-racism. Consequently, the

very element that socially allows the blog to ‘poke fun at white people’ also inhibits critical engagement of the reasons for such essentialized attributes and performances of whiteness, namely white privilege. In order to make the blog’s framework antiracist, it would require removing one of the elements that made it popular in the first place – the satire. Therefore the structure with the satire for “Stuff White People Like” would never allow full critical engagement because humour lets the critical out the door.

It is important to remember that regardless of the structure of how people *have* engaged with the site, using the blog as a place for analyzing and engaging everyday discourses of race, performance of racialized identities, and definition of whiteness provides important information about how such structures are continually enacted and engaged, which *is* an important goal of antiracist education. The site itself might never be antiracist, but its content provides a very in-depth, real-world understanding of how race functions in popular discourse and how racialization is enacted in those discourses. In particular it gives a snapshot of where and how people understand racialized identities in relation to power – or perhaps more importantly whether they see them as relations of power at all, as an ignorance of the structures of power in race is one of the largest roadblocks to antiracist work (Dei, 2006; Stanley, 2011).

In order to engage in antiracist pedagogy that is critical of whiteness as a racialized category and emphasizes knowledge production of white identities, Giroux (1997) reminds us that we must also “move beyond ‘whiteness’ as simply a trope of domination” (Giroux, 1997, p. 296) and remain critical of its positioning in other social categories of oppression as well. This is very poignant in reference to the ways in which whiteness create the myth of white as privilege, controlling the borders of white ‘purity’ to ‘other’ different identity formations of whiteness that do not ‘fit’ within this mold such as the ‘wrong kind of whites’

(read white trash) and Jewish identities (which are read as another sub-section of white that is devalued and belittled in comparison to the myth of whiteness as a performance of privilege). Consequently the analysis of the blog and the user comments reveal the type of deep and critical analysis that is required for critical pedagogies of race and especially whiteness as it not only opens and troubles the knowledges of white identity that are produced and learned through the blog's racialized framework, it also articulates some of the complexities of white as a racial category that move beyond seeing it as a monolithic category of dominance.

Understanding and working through the contextual and situatedness of race and power in everyday discourses is vital to larger understanding of how knowledge of race and racism are produced in popular culture. As Dei (2006) points out, "understanding the use of power is at the heart of progressive politics for change" (p. 14). Dorothy Smith's (1988) feminist sociology investigates an understanding of the "everyday world as problematic." This worldview speaks to understanding the everyday as something continually imbedded with experience, history and always informed by larger systems of control and domination. This concept is an important stepping-stone for potentially furthering understanding the importance of the 'everyday' and its power to produce knowledge that becomes crucial in all social interactions. Smith (1988) characterizes the everyday problematic as "an abstraction of organization from the everyday world and the location of organizing processes in externally structured and differentiated relations" (p. 94). In this sense our everyday interactions seem to be innocent of the structures and even the meta-discourses that inform them. Paying attention to the everyday allows for an understanding of how this 'externalization' and abstraction of structure of domination occur. This study then follows with Smith's (1988) idea of the 'everyday as problematic' as it reveals how 'everyday' discussions, knowledge

production, and context shape larger concepts. In this instance this means how the user comments of a single blog come to exemplify and shape understandings of race, whiteness, and identity in reference to those concepts for those people. Understanding the everyday discourses of race and whiteness within this blog reveal the ways the structures of white privilege, racialized identity and membership and the ‘rules’ of humour and satire are affecting people in real and significant ways. What Smith’s (1988) analysis urges, is to reconsider that the everyday world is material, real and has real, significant and material effects. It is “actual” and not a static, controlled setting for analysis. Though researchers must create barriers and endings within their work in order for analysis to begin, much like the case study here, what must always be part of that analysis is the admission and the continued understanding that such analysis is ‘of the world’ and ‘in the world’ – a material part of it and therefore has ‘of the world’ and ‘in the world’ affects for those that participate in it.

The blog “Stuff White People Like” was created within a world where anti-racist education is and should continue to be a priority, but what the blog and the user comments reveal is that the world from which such initiatives are in place still allows anti-Semitic discourses to flower and racist humour to prosper. Institutional education must be continually aware that students do not live, work and learn in a vacuum, but rather their experiences in the world shape their understandings of themselves and others just as much as traditional curriculums within institutions. Antiracist education must be open to more of the complexity of education and to understand a more “broadly and holistically defined [education] to include schools, colleges, universities, law, and justice, media, employment and trades, the arts and popular culture” (Dei 2006, pp. 14-15). Antiracist education is therefore not necessarily routed in schooling institutions specifically, but must engage with the ways in which politics of racialized power ‘work’ and are produced in the larger context of

knowledge production sites that people come in contact with and affect them, both those marked as powerful and those that need empowering, everyday. As Zine (2003) relates when referring to Islamophobia, “it is imperative that educators work to ensure that students learn about how the media educate about otherness, and how this enters into our understanding of the world” (Zine, 2003, p. 1). Consequently media outlets like blogs and online communities act as powerful outlets for racialized knowledge production and understanding that all educators must be aware of in the practice of antiracism. It is important to note however, that these same sites of racist exclusion are also potential sites of rooting antiracist initiatives as they are catalysts for change; they produce popular knowledge and therefore have the potential to also produce popular counter-knowledge for antiracism regarding the effects of essentialized understandings of identity in particular. As Bonnet (2000) writes:

Although anti-racism may be discerned in almost every area of popular life, its presence has been particularly marked within cultural production (especially music), youth cultures, media and religion. The question of why anti-racist ideas and practices have developed particularly strongly in these fields may, in part, be answered by reference to their characteristic ability to communicate the expressive and socially challenging content of anti-racism. Anti-racism has a message, it is a discourse of change. (pp. 88-89).

Consequently, although this thesis reveals the very real and potentially damaging effects of racialized discourses in one popular culture site, by virtue of their continual production of knowledge and ideologies, such sites like “Stuff White People Like” have the potential to be spaces of antiracist praxis. By acknowledging the power of popular culture artefacts to produce knowledge, educators both officially within the institution and outside of it, can

engage such sites as discursive sites of change in the hopes of breaking down essentialized understandings and knowledges of race and all social categories for a better future for all.

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Appendix A

“A black brother” comment thread

Note: The posts that appear here are a direct copy of those that appear in that blog and the levels reflect the thread to follow which user is responding to which comment. As an example, ‘Eugene’ (2008, March 25) is replying directly to ‘A black brother’ (2008, March 25), whereas ‘White guy’ (2008, March 26) is most likely responding to ‘Eugene’.

A black brother on [March 25, 2008 at 1:05 pm](#)

Hmmmm somehow this website is not racist. Its ok to make fun of one race as long as its white right? Imagine if someone created stuffasianpeoplelike or stuffblackpeoplelike. It would be down within minutes because we would all consider that racist.

Eugene on [March 25, 2008 at 1:09 pm](#)

I think we totally need “Stuff Asian People Like” and “Stuff Black People Like” sites. Preferrably done by white people.

White guy on [March 26, 2008 at 6:37 pm](#)

White people like fighting racism by fighting against websites pointing out idiosyncrasies of particular races. Except against white people.

Whitest guy here on [March 27, 2008 at 8:24 pm](#)

Idiot

Brian on [March 30, 2008 at 11:16 am](#)

Guess what a stereotype is...

Yeah, its a bunch of people seeing the same damn thing...

Anonymous on [March 26, 2008 at 8:54 pm](#)

don't you know satire when you see it?

another white guy on [March 27, 2008 at 7:34 pm](#)

you people are ridiculous these post on this site are so funny especially 61 about bicycles it's not meant to be racists just funny so enjoy it don't act like it hurts you are anyone else reading it

newly converted on [June 5, 2008 at 1:32 pm](#)

i think i hear satire! but you can see it if you want.

MAM on [April 2, 2008 at 5:18 pm](#)

I think white people would be the only ones to create such sites... we do, after all, enjoy explaining things.

you don't need to know that on [March 25, 2008 at 1:16 pm](#)

I'm pretty sure a white person writes this blog. Unless it was an Asian or Black person that wrote it, and it bashed white people for enjoying these things, it isn't

racist. This site won't even flirt with racism unless it starts poking fun at other ethnic groups. You obviously don't get on the internet much since you think sites can be "taken down" within minutes of their launch just because of their name. The chances are, "stuffblackpeoplelike" already exists in a completely different form. Lighten up, dude (which is something else white people like: calling other men "dude").

Anonymous on [March 25, 2008 at 3:18 pm](#)

Waahhhhh. Racist. Blah. Blah. Blah.

Anonymous on [March 25, 2008 at 5:51 pm](#)

That would be, "bwaaaaaaa!" Get your terminology right.

Jonathan on [March 25, 2008 at 9:06 pm](#)

Actually, it should be ok to make fun of black people, too. At some point people forgot that there's a difference between picking on a person and making fun of people.

johngirl on [March 26, 2008 at 2:48 am](#)

Feel free to check out <http://stuffeducatedblackpeoplelike.wordpress.com/>

It's just as satirical and oh so embarassingly true. And we all know that we can never really call it racist if it's true

Whitey McWhite-White on [March 26, 2008 at 5:06 am](#)

A black brother? Is there any other kind of brother?

G on [March 26, 2008 at 12:06 pm](#)

That's just ignorant. Racist?

Are we still laboring under that false ideal that color blindness is color equality, or is it possible to have an honest (even humorous) dialogue about the pronounced caricatures (i.e. stereotypes) of various cultures, religions and even races provided such is done without hate or superiority? If the answer is the former, then I suggest the person above watch the stand-up of a great thinker named Mr. Richard Pryor, and catch up to, say, the 1970s.

anowneemuss on [March 27, 2008 at 9:19 am](#)

dat be "ignint"

CaptainRandom on [May 13, 2008 at 3:05 am](#)

Now that was a white answer.

Anonymous on [March 26, 2008 at 2:20 pm](#)

Then please explain to me how only black comedians get way with making fun of white people? Why can't a white comedian get way with making fun of black people? "Reverse" racism is not only common, but acceptable. I don't think it should be, but it is.

David Wilson on [March 28, 2008 at 8:39 am](#)

Its never racist to take the piss out of your own ethnic group. Ever watch any Mell Brooks movies? Nobody but a Jew could get away with what he does when joking at the expense of the Jews without being called an anti semite – and I.ve seen video of a famous black comedian making fun of ‘Stupid Niggas’. Cant remember the guys name right now.

So yes... its ALWAYS fine to make fun of your own people.

BTW I’m a Brit.. we’ve always had a love/ hate affair with racist humour.. especially about the dumb micks...

godimsickofstupidpeople on [March 30, 2008 at 6:53 am](#)

This has always driven me nuts.. you do realize that the Irish are the SAME RACE as you, right? They are as white as you are! So if you need to find a reason to feel superior (you Brits excel at that) I would think you could come up with something more accurate. The fact that someone of British citizenry even has the gall to make a comment like that after centuries of oppression, rape and murder of the Irish people is sickening.

This whole blog is idiotic, and not even remotely funny. Hurrah for broad generalizations and creating more division between groups by highlighting their “otherness”. Hahaha hilarious /

emtee009 on [April 12, 2008 at 3:09 pm](#)

Please go find a sense of humor. If people can’t laugh at themselves about their idiosyncrasies (?) then the apocalypse is upon us. If you can’t find humor in this blog–go somewhere else. It’s really easy to just click the “X” in the upper right hand corner. Ya’ll have made my day. WP are fun to make fun of–we can be absolutely enthralled with ourselves sometimes.

Appendix B

Screen shot of threaded comments from “#92 Book Deals” (clander, 2008, March 26).

E
Educated on March 26, 2008 at 7:15 pm

We're waiting on our book deal!
<http://stuffEBPliike.com>

[Reply to this comment](#)

E
Anonymous on March 27, 2008 at 2:27 am

We will be at the store of white men, borders, to read your book.

We love Borders or Barnes and Nobles so much that we are dying with them in their cash flow.

[Reply to this comment](#)

E
Vespertine on March 27, 2008 at 9:41 am

Actually, I will pick up the book at the other white people store – Target. White people love that place.

[Reply to this comment](#)

E
Sam on March 27, 2008 at 11:23 am

Actualy both of you guys are waaayyyy off.

White People love independent bookstores and will go to great lengths (that's about 2.5 miles in their Pruis/1997 Volvos) to avoid shopping at chain bookstores (even though they do end up buying most of their stuff from there.)

Hey Lander, good blog.

BTW, you have anti-doppelganger blogger there. Lives in Houston, TX, likes

-chain stores
<http://the-last-shall-be-first.blogspot.com/2008/01/books.html>

-beef,
<http://the-last-shall-be-first.blogspot.com/2007/11/good-steak.html>

-football (probably hates soccer),
<http://the-last-shall-be-first.blogspot.com/2007/12/oh-how-strange-instant-replay-is.html>

commercial grade industrial chocolate

Children of the Night
<http://fatamerican.tv>

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- October 2010
- September 2010
- June 2010
- March 2010
- January 2010
- December 2009
- October 2009
- August 2009
- July 2009
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- April 2009
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