Case Study in Media Bias: Racism and Online News Comment Boards

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of Master of Arts in Educational Foundations

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Abstract

There is a gap in current critical media literacy studies, in that the vast majority of studies focus exclusively on critique of national print media outlets. The internet has recently provided a new medium in the form of online mainstream national news media comment boards, where consumers of the news are allowed to post anonymously their opinions about topics in the news. The purpose of this research is to analyze a selected content of comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards contained on Canadian national news media websites to determine the nature of democratic discourse that occurs, specifically asking whether these comments are potentially harmful and racially discriminatory to marginalized groups. Central to the theme of this research is determining what constitutes acceptable speech versus what could be considered hate speech. This research considers the media's role in giving consumers of the media an opportunity to post unsavory viewpoints using a pseudonym. Grounded in critical race theory, this research uses critical discourse analysis to examine the contents of online mainstream national news media comment boards for racist content. It uses analytical methods that determine whether a statement is a reasonable argument or a persuasive opinion that is harmful or discriminatory toward marginalized groups. A news story from recent history has been used as the subject of this analysis. Central to education, themes of racial discrimination are examined as an argument for teaching students to be critical while promoting citizenship education.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Michelle Forrest, for her constant encouragement and for keeping me on track, and most of all, for teaching me to question in everything I do. I would also like to thank my committee member, Rita Deverell, for impressing upon me the value of proper presentation. I must thank my parents, Peter and Jane Rogers, for teaching me the value of critical reading. Most of all, I want to thank my loving wife, Amanda Rogers, for her constant love and encouragement and my unborn son who provided me with the inspiration to finish this research. I cannot wait to finally meet you!

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

The landscape of news has been changed significantly by the onset of technological resources. The internet age has created an environment where many consumers of the news have the opportunity to read online publications rather than the more traditional printed media. A recent study by the Canadian Media Research Consortium (2011) found that television is still the preferred method of news consumption, with 38 percent of Canadians preferring these media. However, thirty percent of those polled chose the internet as their preferred method of news consumption, with newspapers being the preferred method of news consumption for twenty three percent of those polled (Canadian Media Research Consortium, 2011). The most important statistic for educators to be aware of is the gap between young and old when it comes to news consumption. Fifty three percent of those aged 18-34 chose the internet as their preferred medium for news consumption and only fifteen percent chose the traditional print medium as their preferred method of news consumption (Canadian Media Research Consortium, 2011). With these innovations to the way we consume our news, opportunities for interactions with media outlets has increased, especially among youth.

Due to the fact that youth are engaging with online media as ways of collecting information and news, there is a need for concerns about these media to be addressed at the educational level. Modern theorists have stressed the need for critical media literacy to be included in the education process of today's youth. The literature has tended to focus on media bias at the national level, especially as we are increasingly living in a world where media control has fallen into fewer hands. Torres and Mercado (2006) believe that critical media literacy should be focused on educating students about alternatives to what they term "for profit corporate media" (260). Building on this argument, Torres and Mercado (2006) stress that

alternative media allow the public to be truly informed in a participatory democracy. According to Torres and Mercado (2006), teaching critical media literacy includes "understanding the educators' responsibility to help students become critical media's literate and actively engaged in alternative media use and development" (261). This view of critical media literacy seems simplistic. Is it really the role of the educator to influence students' media choices? The educators' role is rather, to influence the way student's read media critically by providing the theoretical background that allows students to critically analyze media. However, Torres and Mercado (2006) do correctly state that it is the role of educators to teach students the ways in which the media reproduces current social, political and cultural power structures.

Orlowski (2006) contends that "the general public in Canada has a limited understanding of the role of the media in influencing and controlling discourse, particularly around important social, political and social issues" (177). Orlowski (2006) parallels Torres and Mercado in that he believes that it is the educator's role to provide a site of counter-hegemonic discourse. Orlowski (2006) states that "it is imperative that, as a society, we support the Deweyian notion of developing a critically thinking citizenry capable of understanding what is in the best interest of everybody" (179). According to Orlowski (2006), we are living in an age of media bias and critical media literacy provides an analytical framework to evaluate "narrative structures, languages and images in use across media; to interpret meaning for different purposes; and to evaluate what is trustworthy and reliable information" (188). At no point in history has information been so instantly accessible. The internet has provided the student of today's world with informational capacities at the click of a button. Information exists well beyond the traditional print media or the peer reviewed journal collection found in most library systems.

There is a gap in current critical media literacy studies, in that the vast majority of studies focus exclusively on critique of stories contained on national news media outlets. The internet has recently provided a new form of electronic communication in the form of online comment boards. These phenomena, often referred to as forums, are readily available to users of most national news media sites to post under a pseudonym to express their opinion about topical national news stories. I intend to analyze a selection of content of comments left on online news media comment boards contained within mainstream national news media websites in Canada to determine the nature of the discourse that occurs. Specifically, I will be analyzing commentary posted by anonymous internet users about stories involving marginalized groups to determine to what extent those comments are potentially harmful and racially discriminatory to marginalized groups. I will analyze the ethical considerations in allowing readers to post on online comment boards using a pseudonym. Central to the theme of this research is determining what constitutes acceptable speech versus what could be considered hate speech. When does an opinion become harmful to another person? Using critical discourse analysis as my methodology, I will analyze the contents of online comment boards in response to a particular story, which will serve as the main case study. Central to education, themes of racial discrimination will be examined as a demonstration for teaching students to analyze the media critically to encourage positive citizenship.

Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) references the fact that new media have actually increased the opportunity for citizen participation with media. Readers now have the opportunity to express their opinions about news as it happens, often leaving opinions on reported stories via online comment boards which are visible to the public. In previous history, the news was consumed through television and print media. Consumers' views on the news could only be expressed

publicly by writing letters to the editor or the time honoured tradition of calling in to talk radio.

Material to be published would be up to the media outlet's discretion. On mainstream national

news media websites, they still can exercise this choice but have chosen to allow anonymous

commentary on sensitive issues.[1] Most national mainstream news media websites require that

their users follow a list of guidelines such as staying on topic and remaining respectful (Canadian

Broadcasting Corporation, 2012). However, how closely these comments are moderated is open

to debate and the onus is often on other users to report inappropriate content. In the past, letters

to the editor served to give voice to social activists when no other opportunity was forthcoming

(Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007). However, Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) notes that "Even if editors do not

deliberately skew their *selection* of letters in favour of particular groups, researchers have found

"considerable evidence that letter writers are demographically and politically unrepresentative of

the public" (48).[2] Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) found that the selection of letters to be published often

favoured the more educated populace and did not represent public opinion. However, to what

degree does society want to be driven by uninformed opinion? In order for a democracy to be

forward thinking, then perhaps these old safeguards to publication are not necessarily a bad

thing. Historically, letters to the editor have been journalism's way of committing to democratic

discourse by allowing readers the opportunity to weigh in on the debate. In order for someone to

weigh in on a debate then it should be considered that they be informed on the relevant issues in

order to present a reasonable argument.

Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) states that for journalists "As the caretakers of the public forum,

they feel compelled to refrain from intervention in order to give their customers/readers the

impression that they own the forum simply by virtue of their own participation" (69). Carr

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[1] This was a comment by M Forrest that helped me arrive at this point on April 21, 2012.
[2] The use of italics in this passage is taken from the original text.

(2010) notes that "The interactivity of the medium has also turned it into the world's meeting house, where people gather to chat, gossip, argue, show off, and flirt on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and all sorts of other social (and sometimes antisocial) networks" (85). Editors have the final say on what is publishable in the letters to the editor section. Online comment boards often rely on users to report inappropriate conduct, creating a landscape where potentially hateful material is not only published, but available to readers at any time of the day.

I became aware of this issue while reading online mainstream news media outlets. When reading commentary posted on the comment boards by fellow online news readers, I began to recognize that opinions expressed on the comment boards were often provocative, especially when subject matter dealt with issues involving marginalized groups. There were numerous racial problems at my high school while I was growing up. The tension culminated when a friend of mine was brutally beaten by a group of First Nations students, resulting in a day of tension where the White Caucasian community was trying to hold the entire First Nations community culpable for the actions of a few.[3] The principal thought it best to send the First Nations children home, therefore removing what he took to be the problem. The incident still leaves me with a bad taste in my mouth, especially as I had friends on both sides of the issue. I ignored the power that exists in the written or spoken word and never said a word about the school administration sending the First Nations children home. My interest in covering this topic stems partially from my guilt at not having spoken out against racially discriminatory practices that I recognized during my high school years. In addition, I believe strongly in the responsibility of an individual for statements that he/she utters. Allowing a person anonymously to post a hateful comment on

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[3] Painter (2003) correctly points out that referring to all 'White' people as Caucasian is wrong, in fact there are many people in the world who are considered Caucasian such as those from the Indian sub-continent. Therefore, I will specify White Caucasian throughout this research. I will elaborate upon this concept further in chapter 8.

online mainstream Canadian news media comment boards gives the opportunity for that

individual to avoid that responsibility.

For the purposes of this research, I am using a definition of racial discrimination from

Freeman's (1995) foundational text in critical race theory, *Legitimizing Racial Discrimination*

through Antidiscrimination Law: a Critical Review of Supreme Court Doctrine. Freeman (1995)

notes two ways in which racial discrimination can be viewed, either through the eyes of the

victim or through the eyes of the perpetrator. Freeman states that "from the victim's perspective,

racial discrimination describes those conditions of actual social existence as a member of a

perpetual underclass. The perpetrator perspective sees racial discrimination not as conditions but

as actions, inflicted on the victim by the perpetrator" (Freeman, 1995, 29).

Freeman (1995) goes on to claim that the antidiscrimination laws perpetuate the problem

as they do not tackle the preexisting social reasons for discrimination in the first place. Freeman

(1995) states that:

> Central to the perpetrator perspective are the notions of "fault" and "causation." Under
>
> the fault idea, the task of antidiscrimination law is to separate from the masses of society
>
> those blameworthy individuals who are violating the otherwise shared norm. The fault
>
> idea is reflected in the assertion that only "intentional" discrimination violates the
>
> antidiscrimination principle (30).

Freeman is alluding to the idea of systemic racism. Scheurich and Young (1997) provide some

useful definitions when considering racial discrimination. Firstly, there are two kinds of

individual racism, overt and covert. According to Scheurich and Young (1997) overt racism "is a

public, conscious, and intended act by a person or persons from one race with the intent of doing

damage to a person or persons of another race" (5). Overt racism is easily detectable in that an individual is using language or actions that are readily identified as racist. Covert racism is equally as racist but more difficult to determine. Scheurich and Young (1997) state that "persons making covert, racially biased decisions do not explicitly broadcast their intentions; instead, they veil them or provide reasons that society will find more palatable" (5). The focus of the law has often been on these two individual forms of racism. However, there are bigger societal concerns that Scheurich and Young (1997) note.

Scheurich and Young (1997) clarify a further three forms of racism including institutional, societal and civilizational racism. They clarify that these three forms of racism, often addressed in modern research, have not been addressed in society as a whole due to a lack of recognition of its existence by the dominant sectors of society. Scheurich and Young (1997) identify institutional racism as occurring "when institutions, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to the dominant race" (5). Particular to schools, this occurs when a marginalized group is underrepresented in the curriculum. Scheurich and Young (1997) note that societal racism is similar to institutional racism, yet the hurts caused to marginalized groups are greater because the scope of this racism is larger. According to Scheurich and Young (1997) these forms of systemic racism result in civilizational racism, which is "the level of broad civilizational assumptions, assumptions that, though they construct the nature of our world and our experience of it, are not typically conscious to most members of a civilization" (7).

Freeman (1995) is clear in his assertion that until the victim's perspective is included by the legal system, harmful and racially discriminatory actions are difficult to prove in a court of law. Current antidiscrimination law protects the perpetrators more than the victims because it

does not account for the unconscious civilizational discrimination that is the lived experience of

a member of a marginalized group.

The role of educators is to prepare students to deal with issues of racial discrimination

and social justice. This research is grounded in critical race theory, which is an important

component of citizenship education. Throughout this research, I will discuss the role of educators

in preparing students to engage critically with issues involving acceptable speech and hate

speech. When does speech cross the line and become hate speech? If antidiscrimination law is

designed to favour the perpetrators as Freeman (1995) claims, how can we change it? I do not

have the answer to this ongoing and massive debate. However, as an educator, I am more than

willing to pose and ponder the question so I can better guide teachers to think critically about

these issues. As Freire (2009) states:

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the
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> younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it
>
> becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and
>
> creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world
>
> (34).

What does Freire (2009) mean by education as a practice of freedom? *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed is dealing with societies with a dictatorship government, a world in which the poor

are kept illiterate to fuel the greed of the rich. How can the idea of freedom be applied in the

current practice of teaching in democratic societies? Mandelstam (trans 1989) gives readers a

useful distinction between freedom and license when she states that "Freedom of choice

presupposes two paths, one leading to some distinct beacon that makes existence meaningful,

and the other into the "night and murk of nonbeing"" (266). Mandelstam (trans 1989) uses

Dostoyevsky's word 'license' to describe those on the path to nonbeing, a concept which I

explore more fully later in this paper. Dostoyevsky (1914) spoke of license in terms of torture in

The House of the Dead. Dostoyevsky (1914) stated that "anyone who has experienced this power

and full license to inflict the greatest humiliation upon another creature made in the image of

God will unconsciously lose mastery over his own senses" (229). In my interpretation of

Dostoyevsky (1914), he believed that when people take this sort of 'license' with other human

beings they have lost a level of humanity because of their treatment of others. Our job as

educators is to guide students on the first path, toward a meaningful existence and therefore

freedom. Canada is a free country, one in which people are free to respectfully express their

opinions. Citizenship education plays a critical role in preparing students to not only participate

in the Canadian democratic system, but to participate in a meaningful and informed way.

Before taking up a critical discourse analysis of comments posted on online media

comment boards for racist content, I will discuss the ideas that inform this research. In chapter

two, I will discuss the changes in both education and media consumption resulting from

technological advances in addition to introducing critical race theory and the ideas of citizenship

education. Chapter three will open the discussion about the merits of online media comment

boards as democratic forums. In chapter four, I will take up the concept of anonymity in an

online environment, especially as most, if not all, contributors to online media comment boards

post under pseudonyms. In chapter five, I will discuss the current literature about racism in the

online world before embarking on a discussion about media bias using the example of the

disaster in the city of New Orleans as the result of Hurricane Katrina to illustrate my point. In

chapter six, I will introduce critical discourse analysis as my methodology for analyzing specific

comments taken from online mainstream national news media comment boards. Next, chapter

seven will introduce the concept of hate speech before discussing some themes of racism found

in online media comment boards and embarking on a critical discourse analysis of those

comments in chapter eight. In chapter nine, I will discuss the implications for this research for

education and suggest ways in which this sort of critical discourse analysis can be infused into

the Nova Scotia public school curriculum before concluding in chapter ten.

Chapter Two: Computer Savvy Students

Students in the modern age are computer savvy. Information is accessed by today's youth via the internet at a rate never before experienced in history due to the recent innovations in communication technology. Students have the capacity and are encouraged to engage with the blogging environment, with modern technology providing the opportunity for students to experience what Ducate and Lomicka (2008) call "the blogosphere" (9). The blogosphere is referencing the fact that students are using the internet, whether in the classroom or through social media to have their voices heard. Teachers can now use the internet as an educational tool that allows students to connect with the outside world from the classroom (Ducate and Lomicka, 2008). However, students must be prepared properly before they engage the world via the internet. Frye, Trathen and Koppenhaver (2010) outline some best practices for teachers using blog publishing as an educational tool. As Frye et al, (2010) state, "Social Studies teachers have many responsibilities in successfully teaching students the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to be effective citizens" (46). These responsibilities are broken down into four subsections according to Frye et al (2010) which are as follows:

1. Acquire, organize, interpret, and communicate information;

2. Process information to investigate questions, develop knowledge, and draw conclusions;

3. Generate and evaluate well-informed, alternative approaches to problem-solving and decision making; and

4. Interact responsibly with others (46).

Of course, this responsibility does not only fall to Social Studies teachers, all educators must lead the charge in creating responsible and critically inclined students. As Giroux (1999)

correctly inquires, "How do we develop forms of critical education that enable young people and adults to become aware of and interrogate the media as a major political, pedagogical, and social force?" (11). Brown and Morgan (2008) quote Rogers when they suggest that "being an effective citizen "needs appropriate attitudes, knowledge, understanding, skills and experience. Developing these is a lifelong evolutionary process like education" (283). To this end, citizenship and peace education is calling on educators to prepare students to participate effectively in all aspects of their lives (Lapayese, 2003).

Citizenship education is a phrase that has been used too variously. For example, Osborne (2001) rightly points out that in Canadian history, Aboriginals were forced into residential schools, minorities were assimilated and women were trained to be domestic and maternal all in the name of Canadian citizenship. This is certainly not the kind of citizenship education that I am advocating; but rather, as Osborne (2001) defines citizenship education, it is a "call for service to the community, to include the possibility of a critical analysis of social realities" (35). To this end, an aspect of citizenship education that is imperative is anti-racist education. McLaren and Fischman (2003) state:

> Anti-racist education addresses itself to more than the project of contesting dominant institutional arrangements or personal 'attitudes' in a society driven by various racisms and forms of class and gender stratification. As a form of revolutionary multiculturalism, anti-racist education addresses ways in which global economic restructuring helps to embed racist and patriarchal practices in the politics and practices of everyday life. It also unmasks the ways that race, class and gender arrangements are mutually constitutive of the capitalist social order. Revolutionary multiculturalism is fundamentally a counter-hegemonic strategy that attempts to help teachers unlearn racist practices as well as

develop forms of revolutionary agency capable of contesting dominant arrangements

within white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (495).[4]

Anti-racist education is not simply teaching people to tolerate each other. According to Mclaren

and Fischma (2003), racist ideologies are learned practices that society passes down from one

generation to the next. Educators must be willing to recognize that there is a need for critical

self-evaluation when dealing with issues of racism before educators are capable of engaging

students with these issues. Lipmann, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) provide the theoretical

framework for engaging students in citizenship education by using philosophy in the classroom.

They focus on literacy as deriving from thought. In other words, if children can be taught to

think, this will help them to read. Lipmann et al (1980) say that "instruction in the procedures of

reasoning can be very helpful in developing the art of thinking" (4). However, they note that

educational establishments have often underestimated the child's capacity for reasonable

thought, especially since most teachers were never taught themselves the fundamental processes

of reasonable thought. Close analysis of key concepts in texts can help our future students

contribute reason to their future arguments about race and racism.

However, in order for educators to properly engage students to analyze texts closely in

the classroom, especially when considering controversial topics surrounding systemic racism,

educators must be prepared to analyze their own contributions, albeit unconscious, to the current

status quo. McIntosh (1989) offers educators the opportunity to *unpack white privilege* by

providing a list of 'privileges' that White Caucasian people enjoy but do not necessarily

recognize. McIntosh (1989) notes that "Describing white privilege makes one newly

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[4] Critical race theory does not use the phrase 'white supremacy' to promote 'white power' as it has historically been used by racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, but rather, it is critique of the dominant members of society, White Caucasians, who unconsciously or consciously act in ways that maintain a system of white privilege.

accountable" (1). Similar to McIntosh (1989), I have pondered my own societal privilege as a White Caucasian educator. Soloman, Portelli, Daniel and Campbell (2005) stress the importance of recognizing white privilege in their study which focused on reactions to McIntosh's article among 200 training teachers. They cite the difficulty that people of the dominant group have confronting issues of systemic racism especially when the reality of racism is incongruent with their ideology on the matter (Soloman, et al, 2005). Reflecting back on my experience in high school, it has become clear to me that the reason I was not on a bus heading home after the scenes of racial tension is because I am a member of the dominant sector of society. I was not then able to recognize my privilege at the age of sixteen, but my journey into the realms of educational theory have forced me to confront my privilege and I encourage other educators to do the same. Critical race theory, as I will introduce next, provides white consumers of educational theory the opportunity to 'unpack' their privilege.

Current scholarship into anti-racist education has borrowed much from critical race theory. Critical race theory began as a series of scholarly publications in legal scholarship that examined antidiscrimination law, specifically how "facially neutral," "colorblind" laws perpetuated decidedly unequal protection of rights and privileges in American Society" (Su, 2007, 532). I will discuss the notion of colourblindness more extensively as this chapter develops. Critical Zamudio, Russell, Rio and Bridgeman (2011) state that "The critical race theory (CRT) critique of liberalism provides students with a powerful tool to deconstruct the nature of society and its institutions" (15). In this sense, liberalism is not referring to a political party but rather to the idea that all people are created equal and have the same rights (Zamudio et al, 2011).

Critical race theory critiques the institution of liberalism and points out that there is contradiction between liberalism's idea of "education as the great equalizer" and the reality of lived experiences in schools (Zamudio et al, 2011, 16). Liberalism in education fails to account for the continuing racial inequity within schools because schools are designed to serve capitalistic institutions which determine a person's class before they ever enter the classroom. Zamudio et al (2011) state that "Civil rights movements removed the most blatant legal institutional barriers to schooling, but failed to address the multitude of social inequalities created after more than 500 years of exploitation" (19). According to critical race theory, students of colour enter the classroom equal but are then subjected to a system that does not recognize their unique history of oppression causing a confusion of identity (Zamudio et al, 2011).

Critical race theory's main scholarship is critiquing the notion that society is currently colourblind (Zamudio et al, 2011). Zamudio et al (2011) state that "Colorblindness suggests that today everybody receives equal treatment without regard to race" (21). In fact, when Barrack Obama was elected as the first African American president, political pundits began to claim that Americans were living in a post racial era. (Zamudio et al, 2011). In this regard, critical race theory implicates the civil rights movement for creating an aura of colourblindness (Zamudio et al, 2011), though this certainly was not the intent of the civil rights movement and needs to be viewed in context. Siegel (1997) warns against the "fashion, in these postmodern days, to trash or dismiss foundationalism" (114). Siegel is arguing for reason and rationality in our critiques of societal institutions by reminding us that just because a concept has not been instituted properly does not mean that the original concept was not a valid one. In other words, we should not be too quick to discard the foundations of civil rights. In this way, I would argue that the civil rights

movement is a perfect foundation to build a better society, as is liberalism, despite the

contradictory ways in which it may have been applied. Taylor (2003) states that "In adopting the

ideal, people in the culture of authenticity, as I want to call it, give support to a certain kind of

liberalism, which has been espoused by many others. This is the liberalism of neutrality" (17).

Critical race theory is arguing against this complacency, in other words, the achievements of the

civil rights movement do not mean that the job is done and equality has been achieved. A society

that considers itself colourblind ignores the history of racial discrimination and the all-pervading

role that race plays in modern society. To ignore a person's colour is to ignore the historical

oppression that race entails. Critical race theory is not arguing against the civil rights movement,

but rather, pointing out the areas where the civil rights movements and liberalism fall short,

especially when considering systemic discrimination or what McIntosh (1989) has termed 'white

privilege.'

The final critique that critical race theory offers to society is that of 'whiteness' or

referred to more controversially in the phrase, 'white supremacy.' Zamudio et al (2011) claim

that 'whiteness' is property; it is something that the dominant sector of society owns and

maintains in order to serve its purpose. These concepts of 'whiteness' developed by critical race

theory are not referring to a conscious property, but rather, a property that owes its origins to

years of societal oppression toward marginalized groups, which is often unconscious.

'Whiteness' in education maintains itself by controlling the curriculum. For example,

"negotiating education through the use of standardized tests provides one of many means of

maintaining the property interest of whiteness" (Zamudio et al, 2011, 32). Gillborn (2005) claims

that 'whiteness' is a performance that society engages in, made more dangerous by the fact that

most of the 'actors' do not realize that they are participating in the performance. The

performance is metaphorical, treating the world as though it was some sort of play in which the members of a society are the actors. However, not everyone would be or could be members of this performance. Rather, the performers in this play would be those who do not see or recognize systemic racism. Education is implicated in this performance if the 'actors' are unconscious of the role that systemic racism plays in the lives of the students. It is the responsibility of educators first to recognize and foreground 'whiteness' in order to help students recognize the existence of a 'performance' that serves to maintain a system of discrimination.

An example of the performance that Gillborn (2005) mentions is the debate about the removal of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee from the curriculum in Nova Scotia public school due to its 'racist' content, specifically, the ineffectiveness of the novel in teaching anti-racism. Writing for *The Coast Magazine*, Howell (2005) interviews Clarke, an "Africadian" university professor who states that "*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a great novel, and it should be taught for what it is, a great novel," but "it's not a great novel for teaching anti-racism. It fails to prioritize the blacks in the novel. It is about good white people battling bad white people, but that in no way can be understood as anti-racism. There are many other books that meet that test" (The Coast Magazine). Clarke stresses that the emphasis should be placed on books that are relevant to racism in Nova Scotia and states that '"there are many books that meet the test" (The Coast Magazine). Nova Scotia educators' should seek out literature that provides voice to the African Canadian experience.

Su (2007) provides an excellent guide for educators when considering critical race theory's relevance to education:

1. Racism is commonplace, and colourblind conceptions of equality will only address the most egregious forms of individual-based racism, rather than structural inequalities between social groups.

2. "White-over-color ascendency serves important purposes" via the notion of *interest convergence*. Most anti-racist reforms are expected to only happen incrementally, and only when they serve the interests of white elites.

3. Race is socially constructed and historically embedded.

4. In contemporary American society, *the unique voice of color* serves important purposes. CRT contends that the social realities of people of color nevertheless give them experiences, voices and viewpoints that are likely to be different from the mainstream, dominant narratives. It therefore becomes imperative that people of color advance their own *counter-narratives,* often via story-telling modes that fall outside the usual confines of academic discourse (533).

For the purposes of this study, the focus will be on Canadian society. Clarke states that "In Nova Scotia you have a minority community that has to struggle against segregation and racism to this day, and they need to have their history, their culture discussed and realized so that everyone knows the history of the Africadians" (Howell, The Coast Magazine, 2005) . The unique voice of colour is important in Nova Scotia curriculum.

Online news media outlets provide educators with an opportunity to engage students with the issues that critical race theory highlights for education. Citizenship education is essentially preparing our students for participation in a democratic society. Crucial to democracy is discourse. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) defines discourse as "a long and serious treatment or discussion of a subject in speech or in writing" (357). According to this

definition, discourse relies upon a certain level of engagement from an audience. Discourse does

not happen in a bubble, there must be an 'other' to engage in discourse. For the purposes of this

research paper, I am defining discourse as a treatment of subject matter between two or more

individuals to arrive at a collaborative conclusion or impasse. Discourse can occur either during

a discussion between two or more individuals or in the written form, as long as there is a

discussion of some sort. In order to be termed discourse, the discussion should be a serious and

honest contemplation of subject matter. Discourse is not stagnant; it requires the participation of

others. Discourse also requires that participants be held accountable for their statements.

Conversely, language is defined by the Oxford Advanced Leaner's Dictionary (2000) as "the

system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country"

(721). Discourse is the exchange while language is the vehicle of exchange.

Discourse takes place inside the classroom between fellow students and teachers but it is

also taking place in online environments. As I mentioned above, students are increasingly being

encouraged to engage computer technology to connect with the community. Educators must also

prepare students for the realities they are likely to encounter when engaging these online

environments. As summarized above, critical race theory provides teachers with the theory

necessary to have students examine online materials critically as informed citizens. The first step

to examining online discourse as found on online mainstream national news media comment

boards is to determine how these sites weigh in as democratic forums. Do online forums provide

the necessary communication methods for democratic discourse? The next section of this paper

will focus on comment boards as democratic sites of discussion. Contrasting the theories of

Dicken-Garcia (1998) and Akdeniz (2002) with those of Dreyfus (2002), Koch (2005) and

Baudrillard (1993), I will examine the pros and cons of online media forums as democratic

discourse.

Chapter Three: Comment Boards as Democratic Forums

The internet has affected the site of democratic discourse by replacing face-to-face

interactions with an electronic environment in some cases. Readers can now post comments

online on news media sites immediately after reading a news story, offering opinions about news

as it happens while engaging in political debate with other users. Dicken-Garcia (1998) notes

that the vast communication capacity of the internet means users now have the capacity to create

specialized groups at a rate never seen before in the history of discourse. There has been a shift

not only in how we consume the news, but also, how we interact with the story. I use 'interact'

with the story to note the ability to comment online about media stories using online comment

boards. Posting a comment on an online media site and writing a letter to the editor differs in that

posting a comment on an online media site does not require that the writer properly identify

themselves, in fact, it is almost universally acceptable to post under a pseudonym. Engaging the

online media world in this way means that users are consumers and contributors to the news.

Published on online forums, comments left on online mainstream national news media comment

boards become a part of the story, in that they express opinion about news of the world.

Downie Jr. and Schudson (2009) note that journalism as an occupation has changed.

"Reporting is becoming more participatory and collaborative. The ranks of news gatherers now

include not only newsroom staffers, but freelancers, university faculty members, students and

citizens" (29). In the US context, prior to the implementation of the First Amendment,

newspapers were sponsored by political parties and contained largely partisan political content

(Downie Jr. & Schudson, 2009). In the 1960s, more newspapers began to promote what Downie

Jr. and Schudson (2009) define as "accountability reporting that often comes out of beat

coverage and targets those who have power and influence in our lives" (30). Advertisers, whose

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funding has traditionally allowed newspapers to survive, can advertise more cheaply on the internet. Online news media have the capacity to reach a larger audience for a cheaper cost, but it is 'accountability reporting' that Downie Jr. and Schudson (2009) fear we are in danger of losing.

The new methods of communication have plenty of democratic merit, as they provide users with an environment through which to challenge the establishment as seen in the current Arab Spring revolutions, which have largely been fueled through online social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook.[5] At this point, I will elaborate on Mandelstam's (trans 1989) discussion of freedom and license. What does Mandelstam (1989) refer to when she says that license sends people into the "night and murk of nonbeing" (266). Mandelstam (1989) claims that those who choose the path of freedom do so for moral reasons while those who choose license do so for selfish reasons. In Mandelstam's (1989) own words "Freedom says: "This is what ought to be done so I may do it." License says: "I want to do it, so I may do it"" (276). License is action without consideration. Should people be allowed to say whatever they want whenever they want?

Optimists have promoted the internet's capacity to enhance democratic practices while expanding democratic involvement because of the size and scope of the information sharing capabilities (Koch, 2005). Akdeniz (2002) points out that "political activists, human-rights campaigners and organizations, and dissident movements in repressive regimes rely on anonymous communications to communicate human rights abuses in their countries or their

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[5] The Arab Spring uprisings began in the middle-east in December of 2010 and have resulted in the toppling of dictators such as Mubarak in Egypt. For a complete timeline of events of the Arab Spring, please refer to the Arab Spring: timeline of the African and Middle East rebellions on www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews.

views on the state of their governments through the Internet" (224).[6] Akdeniz (2002) goes on to

argue that the ability to hide email address sources and protect identity has allowed oppressed

individuals to claim a voice, whereas in prior history no voice would have been granted other

than the practice of ghost writing. However, ghost writing is distinct from the anonymity

afforded to users of the internet because ghost writers directly attributed their work to another

real world individual whereas internet writers use a pseudonym. The internet has certainly been

influential in the speed with which messages can be passed from user to user and, as I mentioned

earlier, this has fueled modern revolutions against dictators as has been seen in the Arab Spring

uprising. According to Abdul-Ahad, Shenker, Ali, Chulov and Black (2011), the Arab Spring

uprisings have proved successful in toppling some dictators in the middle-east. However,

according to Adbul-Ahad et al, protestors have faced violent repercussions from oppressive

governments in areas such as Bahrain, Syria and Libya.

From an educational standpoint, the internet can provide public school students in

Canada the opportunity to speak out against systemic oppression and avoid persecution for their

political beliefs. For example, Gladwell (2010) outlines an example where 600 protesters showed

up at a local Woolworths store in North Carolina to protest against the racist treatment of a

customer the preceding day. The word about the protest had been spread using social media.

Conversely, the internet has also been used negatively by today's youth to engage in cyber

bullying. However, when I consider the work of Freire (2009) and his writings against

oppression, is there not more value added to his fight against oppression because he had the

courage to attach his name to his ideas? Despite the fact that Freire (2009) was exiled from his

native Brazil as a result of his theories, his writing still provides influence and courage to those

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[6] Akdeniz (2002) capitalizes internet. I have chosen not to as the internet is a thing, not a proper noun.

educators and students who stand against oppression. It is worth considering whether he would be as influential today had he not stood behind his beliefs. As you can see, there are both pros and cons to anonymity. The implications of the anonymous nature of internet discourse will be considered later on in this paper, but first, I will discuss accuracy of internet information.

The internet has increased the level to which individuals can share information. Dreyfus (2002) refers to this process of sharing information as "hyperlearning" (369). However, with the vast information sharing capacity of the internet comes a diluting of relevant information because anyone with a computer can contribute any piece of information presented as fact (even though it may not be fact), creating an atmosphere where no information is too trivial to be included (Dreyfus, 2002). It is worth noting that it is not only organizations fighting repressive regimes around the world that are using the anonymous nature of the internet to have their voices heard. As Dreyfus (2002) states, "just as no individual assumes responsibility for the consequences of the information in the press, no one assumes responsibility for accuracy of information on the web" (371). In this regard, Dreyfus (2002) is not talking only about online media outlets, but rather, about the internet's ability to grant anyone voice. Literally anyone, given that they have access to the internet, can share information on any subject using sites like Wikipedia. I could, hypothetically, buy a domain name and start an online news site. No one would check the reliability of information I could transmit and it could potentially be viewed by millions of internet users around the world. Furthermore, the views I am analyzing with this research are taken from online comment boards found on reputable Canadian national media websites. As Dreyfus (2002) notes, citizens debate topics in open forums while other "anonymous amateurs" post views that seemingly come from nowhere. The anonymous nature of postings in online forums under a pseudonym devalues one special characteristic to

participation in a democracy: personal commitment to obtaining the knowledge and wisdom to contribute to discourse in an open minded way (Dreyfus, 2002).

Imperative to the points made by Dreyfus (2002) about the accuracy of information on the internet is critical thought. Students need to be prepared to recognize the difference between opinion and a reasonable argument. Opinions are fine but are not grounded and require close analysis for proper argument. Critical to encounters with opinion is the ability to recognize the difference between informed views and as Dreyfus (2002) says, those opinions that come from nowhere. Citizenship education requires a group of students who are personally committed to social change. Critically, this includes recognizing that we all have opinions about political issues; it is impossible to be neutral. It is important to be personally committed to one's beliefs while also offering those beliefs up for critical examination in a democratic public discourse. Effective democratic participation demands critical thought, especially when we are engaging anonymously online where anyone can comment on any issue in the global media. Alluding back to Mandelstam's distinction between freedom and license, democratic participation in discourse requires individuals not to shirk responsibility because they have the license to do so (anyone can post anything anonymously online), rather, the principles of freedom in citizenship education require that we engage with these forums responsibly.

Another area where comment boards and online chat rooms fall short of their democratic potential is in the concept of exchange. As Koch (2005) states, "In the Platonic Dialogue called the Phaedrus (1989), Socrates criticized the art of writing as a tool of political life. Writing, he claimed, like speech giving, creates a dead artifact" (171). Socrates is presenting an argument for the dialectic, or dialogue with others, especially dialogue between a teacher who is still learning

and a pupil who is keen to learn. Socrates' argument against the written word is best summed up

in the words Plato attributes to him:

> Then anyone who leaves behind him a written manual, and likewise anyone who takes it
>
> over from him, on the supposition that such writing will provide something reliable and
>
> permanent, must be exceedingly simple-minded; he must be really ignorant of Ammon's
>
> utterance if he imagines that written words can do anything more than remind one who
>
> knows that which the writing is concerned with (Plato, trans 1952, 158).

Hackforth (1951) claims that Socrates' argument is against the written word, stating that

"as a medium of philosophy, whether moral or metaphysical: it [the written word] was always

open to misunderstanding, it could never express the whole mind of the writer" (163). Plato

(trans 1951), through the words of Socrates, is giving testimony to the world about his mistrust

of the written word's ability to express a philosophy (Hackforth, 1951). This has become a fairly

standard argument about the intentions of Socrates' critique of the written word; however,

agreeing with Rabbas (2010), I believe that Hackforth's view requires a more complex

discussion. Rabbas (2010) argues that Socrates is not critiquing all forms of the written word but

those that are presented without the author's presence to defend the rhetorical statements made in

written speeches. Rabbas (2010) elaborates on this point when he says:

> The written word is dead, it cannot talk or, above all, enter a dialogue, an exchange of
>
> words back and forth between two or more minds about the topic under discussion. A
>
> living *logos,* on the other hand, would be one part of that dialogue, for only then can it be
>
> adjusted to the particular person addressed, and only then could its meaning be clarified
>
> and examined through dialectical exchange (35).

Rabbas (2010) continues to argue the point for the dialectic when he stresses that the written

word can also convince the writer that they possess knowledge or wisdom that they do not really

possess. This phenomena is not unique to the written word, indeed, Rabbas (2010) argues that

this can be the case with speech delivery, the written word or any form of communication.

According to Rabbas (2010):

> There is an even worse case, where the words don't express any wisdom at all but only
>
> appear to do so, and this goes undetected because the audience is as lacking in wisdom as
>
> the speaker—or, worst of all, the speaker knows full well that he lacks the wisdom but
>
> utters these words nevertheless because he doesn't care about the truth of what he says,
>
> but only about the persuasion of his audience (40).

Both the written word and speech delivery require an audience that is part of the discussion.

According to Rabbas (2010), the *Phaedrus* should not only be read as a critique of the written

word but also as a critique of what constitutes good speech writing when he says that "the moral

to draw from this is that writings on their own are always potentially dangerous, because they

can so easily lead to the illusion of knowledge and authority, and that, to counteract this danger,

writings are always in need of their author's assistance" (46).

However, the words of Socrates do serve as a reminder that the dialectic is true

democracy in action, as he states when referring to discourse:

> But now tell me, is there another sort of discourse, that is brother to the written speech
>
> but of unquestioned legitimacy? Can we see how it originates and how much better and
>
> more effective it is than the other? The sort that goes together with knowledge, and is

written in the soul of the learner: that can defend itself, and knows to whom it should

speak and to whom it should say nothing (Plato, trans 1951).

Here, Socrates is challenging the reader of texts to gain the required knowledge to engage in the

dialectic with the author or speaker. This is the case in academically peer reviewed articles,

where an article is evaluated for the validity of the argument, and then if deemed reasonable,

published with the knowledge that others will weigh in on the debate. The author cannot simply

walk away from their argument because they are required to defend or revise it based on

discussions with others. Proper argumentation depends upon engagement from the 'soul of the

audience' to arrive at a publicly negotiated determination. Using online comment boards to pass

judgment on an issue creates a stagnant discourse. Though public forums are a virtual 'free-for-

all,' it is unlikely that any comment that an individual posts is going to spark an online debate in

real time. Individuals are more likely to post an opinion and get on with their daily lives,

avoiding critical scrutiny of the opinion they have posted under a false name. In this case, the

individual poster has avoided open discussion in which their opinions may be challenged, or

even perhaps changed. As I argued earlier using Socrates, this kind of interactive debate where

people express and defend their ideas is characteristic of a democracy and appears to be absent

in the online, virtual environment.

Baudrillard would be considered pessimistic about the democratic potential of online

comment boards. Baudrillard (1993) claims that "Meaning is lost within the network of

communications. Deliberation is replaced by immediacy. The real is replaced by simulation"

(161). Koch (2005) takes this to mean that the fight against oppression dies in the virtual world

and is replaced by the alienated individual who has no space for real political discussion.

Baudrillard (1993) says "It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself,

that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes" (343). In the case of online comment boards, real person-to-person dialogue is replaced by the virtual environment. This differs from other methods of electronic exchange, such as emailing or text, because posters on online news media forums do so anonymously. In this sense, I am defining 'real' dialogue in the sense that Socrates does, as a sharing of ideas from one person to the next, in person, using the dialectic where a person can either defend their ideas or shift their way of thinking based on someone else's ideas. On online mainstream national news media comment boards, people are not actually speaking with each other in a sense, because they have substituted their 'real' identity to assume a cyber-identity. Though dialogue is present online, it is what Baudrillard (1993) terms simulacrum, in that it replaces the 'real' conversations necessary for participatory democracy with the 'unreal' conversation of two anonymous online discussion participants. Using maps as an example, Baudrillard (1993) defines the simulacra by stating that "It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—Precision of Simulacra" (34). The result of virtual politics according to Koch (2005) is "political fragmentation" (168). Koch (2005) stresses that in today's mediated digital world; the value of the political message itself is in danger of being replaced by placing the onus on the circulation of that message. Rather than disseminating the message itself, users in online forums trade opinions about topics without evaluating the origin of those opinions. If the focus of communication via the internet is on quantity or speed of transmission and not quality, it becomes apparent that these media of communication are lacking key

components that are required for discourse to occur; namely, a deep or serious discussion of a topic.

The nature of communication on the internet cannot replace the discursive need in a democracy for citizen-to-citizen communication. Bakhtin (1981) drives this point home when he states:

> The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (76).

In other words, discourse, or the dialogic as Bakhtin (1981) calls it, depends upon the 'other'; speech must act in a way that considers not only the word itself but how the object will receive it. The anonymous nature of communication via online comment boards defeats the democratic potential that people feel online communications represents because anonymous posters have the ability to post their comment and walk away from the computer; they do not have to defend or engage with others. Citizen participation in democracy will rather continue to be found in the spirit of open debate with real human beings. The internet's influence on today's youth cannot be ignored, however, so we must prepare students to critically examine content included on online media outlets while also empowering them to reclaim a public space for democratic discourse without fear of reprisal.

To summarize this chapter, the internet has increased the speed with which information can be exchanged, so it has become important to critically evaluate the information being

exchanged. Online mainstream national news media comment boards represent a site of

exchange, yet this exchange is lacking as democratic discourse because the author is not present

to defend his/her speech. Now that we have determined the nature of discourse which occurs on

online mainstream national news media comment boards, I will examine the concept of

anonymity and what this means to online discourse.

Chapter Four: Anonymity: Democratic Merit or Ticking Time Bomb?

Christopherson (2007) defines technical anonymity as "the removal of all meaningful

identifying information about others in the exchange of material. This can include the removal of

one's name or other identifying information from Internet communications" (3040). Becker,

Byers and Jibson (2000) explore racist groups' use of Usenet newsgroups. They discuss in detail

the concept of acceptable speech versus the use of internet-based hate speech. According to

Becker et al (2000) the first amendment in the American constitution reads:

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or *prohibiting* the
>
> *free exercise thereof; or abridging freedom of speech,* or of the press; or the right of the
>
> people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances
>
> (31).[7]

Becker et al (2000) note that hate speech became an issue in the 1920's in America,

leading to new modern laws that prohibit hate speech and therefore change the rules for

discourse about racial issues resulting in the creation of the Anti-defamation League. Becker et al

(2000) define hate speech as "speech that inflicts emotional damage and contains inflammatory

comments to arouse other individuals to cause severe social dislocation and damage" (36). Hate

speech is considered to be devoid of all philosophical or scientific merit in that it only seeks to

damage others and in no way contributes positively to philosophical discourse (Becker et al,

2000). Hate speech is no longer completely protected by the First Amendment.[8] Speech is no

longer protected when it is found that the words inflict harm and injury and attempt to incite

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[7] These italics are contained in the original Becker et al (2000) text.
[8] Becker et al are referring to the evolution of hate speech laws in the United States. I will discuss the Canadian laws further along in this chapter.

violence or breach the peace (Becker et al, 2000). However, according to Becker et al (2000), the following types of statements are still protected by the First Amendment:

> Blanket statements expressing hatred of an ethnic, racial or religious nature are protected by the First Amendment, even if those statements mention individual people and even if they cause distress in those individuals. Similarly, denial of the holocaust—though abhorrent—is almost never actionable under American law (39).

In the United States under the First Amendment it has proved difficult to try websites for permitting the posting of hate speech online. It would be reasonable that you could prosecute the owner of the website, but it may prove more difficult to prosecute the users of the website. The internet, with its opportunity for immediate response to racial issues and the anonymity afforded the users, has proved to be an ideal space for hatemongers and racists to spread their messages of hate. There has always been anonymous racism. For example, members of the Ku Klux Klan have and continue to use white hoods to hide their identities. The internet has simply widened the audience for anonymous racism. Banks (2010) notes that:

> The internet has become the 'new frontier' for spreading hate, as millions can be reached through an inexpensive and unencumbered social network that has enabled previously diverse and fragmented groups to connect, engendering a collective identity and sense of community (234).

The same anonymity that affords those that are oppressed globally to have their voices heard becomes advantageous to those who only mean to oppress others with their use of internet-based hate speech.

Canada's hate speech laws are outlined in Section 319(1) of the criminal code under the

heading, "Public Incitement of Hatred." In order to contravene the code and commit a hate crime

a person must do the following:

> Everyone who, by communicating statements in any public place, incites hatred
> against any identifiable group where such incitement is likely to lead to a breach
> of the peace is guilty of
>
> - (*a*) an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not
>   exceeding two years; or
>
> - (*b*) an offence punishable on summary conviction.
>
> **Willful promotion of hatred**
>
> (2) Everyone who, by communicating statements, other than in private
> conversation, willfully promotes hatred against any identifiable group is guilty of
>
> - (*a*) an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not
>   exceeding two years; or
>
> - (*b*) an offence punishable on summary conviction (Department of Justice
>   Canada, 2012).

Certainly, online media publications are found in what the criminal code defines as a

'public place' as they are accessible to the public via the internet. The statements found on online

comment boards in the mainstream national news media are in a written format, and so they meet

the conditions for prosecution outlined in Section 319(1) of the Canadian Criminal Code.

However, proving that an individual incited hatred against an identifiable group, constituting a

potential breach of the peace is more difficult (Media Awareness Network, 2011).[9] This fact is

further highlighted by potential defenses against a charge of publicly inciting hatred which are

outlined in Section 319(3) of the Canadian Criminal Code:

> - (*a*) if he establishes that the statements communicated were true;

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[9] Identifiable group is the wording that Canadian law uses. To avoid confusion, I will use this phrase when
referencing Canadian hate speech legislation though my preferred terminology throughout this thesis is marginalized
group.

- (*b*) if, in good faith, the person expressed or attempted to establish by an argument an opinion on a religious subject or an opinion based on a belief in a religious text;

- (*c*) if the statements were relevant to any subject of public interest, the discussion of which was for the public benefit, and if on reasonable grounds he believed them to be true; or

- (*d*) if, in good faith, he intended to point out, for the purpose of removal, matters producing or tending to produce feelings of hatred toward an identifiable group in Canada (Department of Justice Canada, 2012).

Since the discourse that takes place on comment boards is commentary on everyday news topics, it would be reasonable to argue that a member of the online community meant their comments to be in the best interest of the public and expressed in good faith to add to an argument. The most difficult aspect of proving online hate speech inevitably lies with proving that the user intended to incite hatred or promoted violence. The courts are not without example of prosecution however, as in the case of *R v Keegstra* in 1990 (Supreme Court of Canada, 1990). The accused was an Alberta high school teacher who was convicted of willfully expressing anti-Semitic beliefs to his students. While the defendant was found guilty the decision does state that:

> While in this case it may be easy to achieve near-unanimous consensus that the statements contribute nothing positive to our society, experience shows that in other cases it may be difficult to draw the line between speech which has value to democracy or social issues and speech which does not. Attempts to confine the guarantee of free expression only to content which is judged to possess redeeming value or to accord with the accepted values strike at the very essence of the value of the freedom, reducing the realm of protected discussion to that which is comfortable and compatible with current conceptions. If the guarantee of free expression is to be meaningful, it must protect expression which challenges even the very basic conceptions about our society. A true

commitment to freedom of expression demands nothing less (Supreme Court of Canada,

1990).

The lines between acceptable speech and hate speech are still extremely vague, for the ruling

offers the reader no comfortable definition of where the line is drawn between acceptable speech

and hate speech. The Supreme Court of Canada did not define what 'content with redeeming

value' consists of, so all this case does is serve to define what content the courts consider does

not have redeeming value.

In the case of *R. v. Krymowski* in 2005, the defendant was charged with public incitement

of hatred for "Communicating including the written statements: 'Honk if you hate Gypsies',

'Canada is not a Trash Can', and 'You're a cancer to Canada'" in front of a motel housing Roma

people seeking entry into Canada" (Supreme Court of Canada, 2005). These statements add

nothing valuable to society, but in this case, the accused was acquitted because the prosecution

could not prove that the term 'Gypsy' referred to the Roma people. There was no way to prove

that the comments were directed at the residents of the motel. *R. v. Krymowski* is an example of

the difficulty of prosecuting hate speech in Canada, and again, it is unclear where the line

between acceptable speech and hate speech falls. Even if it was not possible to prove that the

comments were directed at the Roma people, is it not hateful to communicate the written

statements 'Honk if you hate Gypsies'?

Although online comment boards are often moderated, they also rely on users to report

obscene commentary (CBC News, 2011). Davenport (2002) states that "Experience suggests a

society relying solely on the good will and conscience of its citizens would be unlikely to

succeed in ensuring justice" (33). Although anonymous communication has often been credited

with promoting "free and open exchanges unhampered by prejudices often informed by race, gender, or religion" (Davenport, 2002, 35), it also can be credited with creating an atmosphere where individuals can be discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, religion and sexual preference. In the case of discriminatory text, users should be held accountable for their statements and not be able to hide in cyberspace anonymously (Davenport, 2002).

Unfortunately, when protecting the identity of individuals online, we offer protection not only to those who are striving for meaningful social change, as in the case with Akdeniz's (2002) argument, but also to those who wish societal harm upon marginalized groups. We are painting over identity in much the same way that the Khmer Rouge painted over the road signs of their past civilization (Fawcett, 1986). This is what Fawcett (1986) calls, "the medium without any message, or the technical process that undermines or destroys the identities of those it is intended to benefit" (82).

Integral to the democracy of any society is determining what could be considered acceptable speech and what is determined to be hate speech. The internet has opened up a platform never before experienced for hate speech to reach a broader audience. Brown (2009) says that:

> Cyber-bigots, who maintain First Amendment protection, anonymously and blatantly promote racism and propagate a separatist ideology that has once again become popular in veiled assimilationist campaigns against affirmative action, immigration, and foreign languages. Hate groups post subversive messages on the internet that reinforce racism, xenophobia, and heterosexualism for web surfers to find by choice or accident (190).

Should these groups be free to voice their bigoted opinions in such an anonymous way? By protecting the identity of those who wish to democratize their societies we are also protecting the freedom of those who wish to destroy multicultural society with the spreading of hate literature.

In this chapter, I have discussed current hate speech laws in Canada using two examples that illustrate the ambiguous line between acceptable speech and hate speech in current law. I have also discussed the dangers of allowing users to post comments using a pseudonym in many online forums, especially as people have the ability to spread their message of hate anonymously. Recently, researchers have probed into the internet underworld to expose racist groups and their presence on the internet. Next, I will examine a few such studies that have analyzed the way that marginalized groups have been represented in online discussion.

Chapter Five: Hatred in Cyberspace: The Discourse of 'Whiteness'

As we have seen, recent scholarship has endeavored to understand the concept of 'whiteness'. Brown (2009) says that "Many of these studies are concerned with the taken-for-granted and implicit forms of White supremacy inherent in a White standpoint" (190). I take Brown (2009) to believe that whiteness as a concept is about power, or rather, establishing power over other groups in society. Brown (2009) conducted a study in which he analyzed multiple websites to illustrate the ways in which internet-based hate discourse establishes a hierarchy of power with 'whiteness' firmly in control at the top of the ladder. Brown (2009) found that internet discourse on hate sites attempt to validate theories of hereditary superiority, noting that "Within the racist discourse on the selected websites, Blackness signifies biological inferiority, but it also highlights asymmetrical assumptions of genetic intelligence of people of African descent" (197).

According to Brown's (2009) study, there are hate-based websites contained on the internet where Black males are portrayed as criminal and a threat to peaceful society. On these hate-based websites, perceived double standards are often quoted in reference to affirmative action initiatives. Brown (2009) elaborates on this point, noting that affirmative action is viewed on internet hate websites as 'reverse racism'. The writers assume that the government that legislated employment equity laws take power away from members of the dominant sector of society and give that power to Black people. 'Whiteness' views power sharing through a lens that has resulted in members of the dominant sector being 'less than' in modern society. Brown (2009) states that "Discursive arrangements in discourses of White supremacy underscore how

Whiteness is constructed through antagonistic representations of the Other" (204).[10] In other words, White Caucasian identity is being constructed online as threatened by those who wish to take away the historical power that 'whiteness' represents.

Holtz and Wagner (2009) conducted a similar study, analyzing right-wing internet postings about Africans and Jews. They found similar results to Brown (2009) when analyzing the National Democratic Party's website in Germany. The National Democratic Party was formed in 1964 after bringing numerous other right wing parties together under one roof (Holtz & Wagner, 2009). On their website, party members engage in discourse that portrays those that are different as 'monstrosities'. Again, members discuss Africans as prone to criminal behavior and portray mixed-race relationships as dangerous to the German gene pool (Holtz & Wagner, 2009). In contrast, Jews are portrayed as some sort of super-human group that seek to dominate what are referred to as regular human beings (Holtz & Wagner, 2009). In this case, the commentary on the National Democratic Party website attributes a set of negative characteristics to an entire race of people. In this way, National Democratic Party members are claiming racial superiority for White Caucasian people.

Internet-based hate discourse represents a danger to the multicultural country Canada claims to be. In both of the above studies users of websites were allowed to mask their true identity when expressing hateful viewpoints. That is not to say that the national news media are not culpable in perpetuating discrimination against marginalized groups. It is worthwhile for the purposes of this paper to discuss the national news media's role in perpetuating racial discrimination, especially when considering the implication of 'whiteness'. If systemic racism is

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[10] Brown (2009) has chosen to capitalize the term 'whiteness,' however; I have chosen to follow other theorists such as Zamudio et al (2011) who choose not to capitalize because 'whiteness' seems to refer to a concept and not a race.

a reality, then how has the national news media, as part of the system, contributed to systemic

racism? First, I will discuss the nature of bias and examine a few studies about media bias. I will

conclude with a discussion about media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, as an example of media

bias.

What does it mean to be biased? Forrest (1991) defines the notion of bias as "an

inclination, leaning, tendency or bent" (23). Bias is a word that no human being can escape, we

all are possessors of biases and they inevitably determine how we view the world. Can a human

being, especially a journalist, be free of bias? Schiller (1981) calls into question the idea of

objectivity in the news. Though consumers of media may expect their news to be free from

personal bias, it can never be because of the unconscious biases. As Schiller (1981) notes,

"objectivity ostensibly precludes the very presence of conventions and thus masks the patterned

picture of the news: it is an invisible frame" (2). Schiller (1981) claims that objectivity in the

news is a 'myth' as no one can ever truly be objective. Objectivity when reporting the news is an

ideal that good journalists strive for, however, objectively reporting the news is not possible.

Schiller (1981) says that "there is no fundamentally non-ideological, apolitical, non-partisan,

news gathering and reporting system" (6). Russell (1994) believes no one is completely

objective, we are all defined by our cultural backgrounds and possess distinct lenses through

which we view the world. Though media ethics stresses objectivity as an ideal worth striving for,

it is also recognized that objectivity is never absolutely attainable.

Recognizing the nature of bias, it is worthwhile to explore methods of education that

embrace the concept of open-mindedness. Hare (1979) states that "open-mindedness exists when

we are willing to have our views influenced by evidence and argument" (64). Hare (1979)

references a specific characteristic that defines open-mindedness when he states that "a person

must be both willing and able to revise his own position if he is to be open-minded" (8). Media

studies requires that we teach students to recognize bias when they see it and to this end, Forrest

(2003) recommends that we teach pattern recognition; "to see inside the [in-side, in-site, in-sight]

the workings of a formal system to its characteristics is to gain insight or recognize its

pattern/bias" (65). In this sense, a teacher must also be willing to have biases exposed within the

classroom and be willing to have views challenged. Bias recognition will provide students with

the critical skills necessary to critique the media's handling of certain issues especially when

reporting on issues that involve marginalized groups.

Dixon (2008) conducted a study in which he analyzed how network news contributes to

stereotypes about race. The findings confirmed that network news tended to devalue African

Americans' earning power in the economic world. African Americans' were largely equated with

poverty and crime in local and national news coverage (Dixon, 2008). Dixon (2008) states that

"We might view the media as a source of social learning that essentially teaches, reinforces and

cultivates certain ideas about Blacks" (332). The fact that media increase stereotypical views that

portray African Americans as poverty-stricken criminals runs contrary to what we might hope an

informed citizen would take from the modern news media (Dixon, 2008). However, the reality is

that news media are part of the problem, not part of the solution. News broadcasts suffer from

what Forrest (1991) refers to as "selective bias" (27). News broadcasters choose what stories are

newsworthy and in their rush to get the story to print or on the air they often can use misleading

facts to sensationalize the story (Forrest, 1991). To illustrate this point, I will discuss the media's

role in the perceptions of predominantly African American survivors inside the city of New

Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

When Katrina swept through the gulf coast on August 29, 2005, it not only left a trail of disaster from which the people of New Orleans are still recovering, but also a mass media mix-up that significantly delayed the rescue of Hurricane Katrina's victims. During the evacuation of New Orleans, certain members of the community were unable to escape the ensuing carnage, largely due to the poor conditions in which they lived. These community members were in large part members of the African American community (Garfield, 2007). However, the carnage that was to follow was not solely due to the ensuing storm. Mythologies about what occurs during a disaster tend to develop in the immediate aftermath of colossal occurrence. According to Garfield (2007), "such myths are known as 'disaster mythology,' and they not only influence public perceptions of what occurs during disasters, but also influence the views that shape the emergency response to disasters" (57). The theory of disaster mythology is highlighted by events following Katrina's wake.

When the levees broke in New Orleans, the city was flooded, leaving community members stranded on their roof tops and in the Superdome where they went for shelter. The portrayals in the media after Hurricane Katrina directly influenced the emergency response. Garfield (2007) implicate the media's role in the lack of emergency response, as the media assumed an essence of Black criminality within New Orleans in the aftermath of the disaster, and the result was an emergency response delayed by the apparent need to reinstitute law and order inside the town. According to Garfield (2007) the first reports from the media characterized the survivors as deviant. As Voorhees, Vick and Perkins (2007) state "TV has the strongest effect on viewers during crisis situations when other means of communication break down and television becomes the primary or even sole source of information" (416). The disaster victims were criminalized, with reports of looting, rape and even cannibalization portrayed in the mainstream

media (Garfield, 2007). Garfield (2007) notes that "in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, media accounts of rampant criminal behavior appeared to be true, plausible and typical of the events that were occurring in New Orleans. Yet those accounts were often factually inaccurate, exaggerated and unbalanced" (59).

Garfield (2007) paints a picture of media coverage after Hurricane Katrina, using sources from *The Times-Picayune, The New York Times, The Seattle Times* and *The Arizona Star.* All sources reported looting, raping, murders and beatings, most of which turned out to be exaggerations or complete fabrications (Garfield, 2007). Garfield (2007) provides numerous examples of unconfirmed yet reported chaos that was supposedly taking place within New Orleans after the disaster. I will provide a few to illustrate the exaggerations taking place within the national media at that time:

From *The Time-Picayune:*

"There are gangs of armed men in the city moving around the city," said Ebbert, the city's homeland security chief (Mohr et al, 2005).

From *The New York Times*:

Superintendent P. Edward Compass III of the New Orleans Police Department said, "armed thugs have taken control of the secondary makeshift shelter at the convention center" (Dao & Kleinfield, 2005).

From *The Seattle Times*:

In interviews with Oprah Winfrey, Compass (Superintendent of New Orleans Police Department) reported rapes of babies, and Mayor Ray Nagin spoke of hundreds of armed

gang members killing and raping people inside the Dome (Thevenot & Russell, 2005).

(Taken from Garfield, 2007, 64-65).

Garfield (2007) stresses that the result of these exaggerated and sometimes fabricated stories was a delayed, militaristic response to the tragedy, with survivors being greeted by an armed National Guard who had just entered their city.

The exaggerations mentioned above were readily consumed by a media-hungry populous that were all too ready to consume the half-truths that the national news media proclaimed. The comments made by the government representatives mentioned above were harmful to the rescue operation of Hurricane Katrina survivors. As I stated at the beginning of this paper, my central theme is to determine when comments are potentially harmful to marginalized groups as the exaggerations of the national news media were damaging to the survivors of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

In summary, in this chapter we have seen that there are many websites out there that currently allow users to post racist views under a pseudonym. In many cases, this hateful commentary has focused on notions of 'reverse racism', genetic inferiority and portrayals of the 'other' as threatening to the dominant sector of society. Of course, these websites are clearly threatening to notions of multiculturalism. National news media bias was discussed using the example of Hurricane Katrina to point out that media bias can be harmful to marginalized groups. The next step is to analyze these new forms of media, the online comment boards. In order to analyze comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards, I will introduce critical discourse analysis as my methodology.

Chapter Six: Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to understand critical discourse analysis, one must first examine its origins in discourse analysis and the study of discourse. Fowler (1996) stresses that critical linguistics, to which critical discourse analysis as a theory belongs, seeks emancipation from dominant power structures by stressing that all mediums are determined by the value structure that creates them. Fowler (1996) states that "texts construct 'reading positions' for the readers, that is, they suggest what ideological formations it is appropriate for readers to bring to texts" (7).

Richardson (2007) notes that discourse is a trendy term in today's academic world; indeed, from some peoples view, it is the most well-used or sometimes overused word in current academia. Richardson (2007) stresses that in linguistic tradition, discourse has been defined as "a particular unit of language, specifically, as a unit of language 'above' (larger or more extended than) the sentence" (22). This is a formalist or structuralist view of language in which we understand language through patterns or to quote Richardson (2007), a "system of systems." Structuralism views language as a system of binary opposites, and it is this pattern that traditional discourse analysts view when they are assessing language. Dlamini (2001) notes that "binary tools as analytical tools have been successfully challenged in academic scholarship" (1). Discourse analysis as a research tool has been adapted to meet this challenge to binary opposites. According to Richardson (2007) discourse is no longer solely viewed as a unit of language as researchers have begun to consider how social, historic and cultural knowledge shapes our understanding of language.

Richardson (2007) provides an example to consider when examining how language is culturally constructed. He asks the reader to consider the following grouping of sentences: "The baby cried. The mother picked it up" (22). What do we infer from the following sentence? A

formalist would consider the use of the pronoun 'it' in the second sentence, implying that the

second sentence's use of the pronoun 'it' refers to the baby. The next step that the reader follows

is to apply a narrative to the sentence, we assume that the Mother picks the baby up because it is

crying, when in reality, the two sentences do not specify whether or not the mother and baby are

even in the same location (Richardson, 2007). According to Richardson (2007), the two

sentences could be referring to completely different phenomena, but we culturally construct a

meaning because we expect a mother to pick up a crying baby. Richardson (2007) says that

"What this suggests is that we make sense of discourse partly by making guesses—usually

unconsciously—based on social knowledge" (23). According to cultural linguists like

Richardson (2007), the definition of discourse therefore needs revision, as it is not simply a "unit

of language above the sentence" because this definition ignores the social aspect of language.

Richardson (2007) offers a broader definition of discourse, stating that "discourse is language in

use" and discourse analysis is the "analysis of language in use" (23-24). This definition is closer

to my definition stated earlier in this paper, in that discourse requires others to engage with the

topic in order to be considered discourse.

Critical discourse analysis adopts the view of language which I discussed above. In

addition, critical discourse analysis focuses on power structures of society (Richardson, 2007). It

is worthwhile at this point to consider what it means to be 'critical'. Could discourse analysis not

examine existing power structures without attaching critical to its name? What does it mean to be

critical? Minogue (1985) believes that ideology and criticism are linked together. Critique is

ideology in action, or as Minogue (1985) puts it, "The ideologist first distinguishes himself from

the generality of mankind in his role as a critic of society" (40). Hence, in applying the view of

Minogue (1985) to current scholarship of critical discourse analysis, using the word 'critical' in

critical discourse analysis attaches an ideology to the concept. Minogue (1985) warns against

ideology and when speaking of ideology he states that:

> While affirming freedom, it envisages a community in which only the one right type of
>
> act will be conceivable. It attacks inequalities, yet aims at the destruction of the only
>
> entities—individuals—which could in any serious sense be taken as equal. It affirms
>
> democracy, but envisages a unanimity which would make democracy unnecessary. It
>
> claims the rubric of criticism only to declare its truths incontestable (222).

Minogue (1985) is speaking of a problem within ideology and criticism that is self-

defeating. Democracy relies on the disagreement of its participating members. I refer back to

Hare (1979) to illustrate this view, as it is his theory of "open mindedness" in education that can

safe guard against ideology. Minogue (1985) serves to remind us that our values can reduce to

ideologies and predetermined conclusions if we are not open minded in a democracy.[11] It is with

Minogue's (1985) warning about ideology in mind that I acknowledge the risks associated with

conducting a critical discourse analysis. To be critical is to accept those that do not agree with

your criticisms, and as a fully active member of democracy, I welcome those disagreements. In

this way, I am not solely pursuing ideology, but rather, discussion.

Teun van Dijk is an influential thinker within the theory of critical discourse analysis,

though he started his career more concerned with discourse analysis. van Dijk (1972) states in his

early work that:

> Our linguistic intuition tells us that the semantic material of a text is organized also in
>
> more global patterns. That is, the formation of semantic representations of sentences is

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[11] This was a comment by M Forrest that helped me arrive at this point on April 21, 2012.

not only determined by those of the immediately preceding sentences, but is constrained

by *an meran principie* holding for all the sentences of a text, or part of a text (76-77).

This text highlights van Dijk's former views on language, as his focus was on sentence structure. In addition to being an influential figure in modern critical discourse analysis, van Dijk also serves to illustrate how ideologies can change over time. I will use van Dijk to illustrate how critical discourse analysis has moved beyond the critique of sentence structure to consider how language serves to reinforce current hegemonic power structures in society.

Teun van Dijk (1993) highlights the fact that at its core, critical discourse analysis is dedicated to analyzing the reproduction of dominant power groups in society that result in social inequality. In order to use this method of analysis, one must first recognize and accept the presence of social inequality. As you will see, critical discourse analysis is an ideological method. However, ideology is only dangerous when it is considered to be absolute and this is where I draw a distinction between ideology and open-minded critique. Minogue's (1985) warning about ideology serves to remind of the importance of remaining open to changing one's view in a participatory democracy. van Dijk (1993) says "critical discourse analysts want to know what structures, strategies or properties of text, talk, verbal interactions or communicative events play a role in these reproductions" (250). van Dijk (1993) stresses that a critical discourse analyst must consider the role of "social representations in the minds of the actors" (251). Fowler (1996) borrows from the Frankfurt School when he defines critique and criticism. He notes that:

'Critique' … denotes reflection on a system of constraints which are humanly produced: distorting pressures to which individuals, or a group of individuals, or the human race as a whole, succumb in their process of self-formation…Criticism…is brought to bear on

objects of experience whose 'objectivity' is called into question; criticism supposes that there is a degree of inbuilt deformity that masquerades as reality. It seeks to remove this distortion and thereby to make possible the liberation of what has been distorted. Hence it entails a conception of emancipation (4).

Critical discourse analysts argue that social discourse plays a role in the reproduction of inequality in society (Richardson, 2007). Richardson (2007) provides several issues that critical discourse analysis concerns itself with. They are as follows:

- CDA is concerned with social problems. It is not concerned with language or language use *per se*, but with the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structure.

- Power-relations have to do with discourse, and CDA studies both power in discourse and power over discourse.

- Society and culture are dialectically related to discourse: society and culture are shaped by discourse, and at the same time constitute discourse.

- Language use may be ideological. To determine this it is necessary to analyze texts to investigate their interpretation, reception and social effects.

- Discourses are historical and can only be understood in relations to their context.

- Discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory. Critical analysis implies a systematic methodology and a relationship between the text and its social conditions, ideologies and power-relations (26-27).

Critical discourse analysis and critical race theory share the pursuit of social justice. As I mentioned earlier, according to critical race theory, students of colour enter the classroom equal

but are then subjected to a system that does not recognize their unique history of oppression causing a confusion of identity (Zamudio et al, 2011). The two theories intersect as critical discourse analysis studies how this oppression manifests itself within texts and speech. Lewis (2006) states that "Critical discourse analysis is both a theory and a method that examines how social and power relations are constructed through written, visual, and spoken texts and the contexts of their production and consumption" (374). Critical discourse analysis is an attack on hegemony that destabilizes and exposes existing power structures. Thus, my critiques of racially discriminatory content found in online comment boards visible on online media publications is not an indictment on the individual but rather, an indictment of societal structures that legitimize racist discourse.

Anonymity will be a theme of my discussion, as I am arguing that discourse might also be different were users of online comment boards required to attach a real name to their comments. As an example of these phenomena, I will next examine the differences between a letter to the editor published online with a citizen's name attached to it and a sample taken from an online comment board in which the user published under a pseudonym.

The following is a letter to the editor posted online on the website of a Nova Scotia newspaper:

As one of those who falls into the category of the 58 per cent who have been waiting more than the recommended 182 days to get new knees, I am getting frustrated. It has been more than 31 MONTHS since my surgeon quoted me a "six- to nine-month wait."

I have TWICE been told that I am on the "summer list;" they just neglected to mention WHICH summer.

I cannot contact the surgeon's office to see if I am still on their list. Apparently my family

doctor can't find out anything, either. He faxed the surgeon on my behalf. To my

knowledge, he has not received a reply.

Since I will eventually need both knees replaced, I am wondering how long this will

take? It would be great if both knees would be done at one time. (I said "would" because I

know it CAN be done; but it is usually done as two procedures (Cameron, 2011).

I read this as a letter of frustration, especially with the use of capital letters to emphasize certain

points of frustration. However, the argument is rational because it is grounded in the writer's

experiences with the health care system. These details foster an understanding of the reason for

anger between the author and reader of the text. Note the difference with this next comment,

taken from an anonymous online comment board:

I think these protesters are racist. They should stop taking out there frustrations in life on

the poor people who did nothing to them and direct it on to the idiots who give there

community a bad name.[12]

This comment focuses on a community's name, the reader stating that there are "idiots who give

the community a bad name." The method of discourse is different; there is no story attached to

this posting. Note that in the first example, the writer gave a series of examples that have

increased the feelings of frustration directed about the wait times for surgery. In the second

passage, there is no context for frustration. The user, instead of reasoning out an argument, has

simply stated a conclusion that is lacking evidence for that conclusion.

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[12] Spelling and grammar mistakes are common on online comment boards. The term 'there' should read their, but I have not changed it to protect the integrity of the original comment and to illustrate further differences between anonymous posts and letters to the editor.

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     According to van Dijk (1993) no individual can embark on a critical discourse analysis without a sociopolitical goal. In this case, my sociopolitical goal is to discuss online racist content using critical discourse analysis as methodology to expose hate speech contained on online mainstream national news media comment boards. In this chapter, I have illustrated how dangerous ideology can be because it starts with a foregone conclusion. In order to be properly critical, one must also be willing to have oneself criticized. I have also shown how critical discourse analysis, with its focus on how speech can reproduce power structures is related to critical race theory because they both focus on critiquing power structures in society. Using critical discourse analysis as methodology, I intend to analyze select comments from online mainstream national news media comment boards. First, I will identify any themes that are found to emerge within the news commentary before analyzing both the form of comments written and the social context in which comments are made to determine whether these comments contain racist content. In order to analyze these comments effectively, I will further discuss the difference between acceptable speech acts and hate speech.

Chapter Seven: What is hate speech? An Analysis of Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech*

In order to analyze the commentary left on online media publications, I must first determine how to define the concept of hate speech. Judith Butler (1997) discusses language as a faculty of injury; "We ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as objects of its injurious trajectory" (1). Butler (1997) is arguing that we can never escape the injurious nature of language; "In essence, by using language we ascribe the power to injure, and this power is such that no form of censorship can counter this power" (1). Butler (1997) argues that "we would not want to censor everything; because, as "linguistic beings" we form ourselves within language. Language determines how we communicate with the world and the method with which the world communicates with us" (2). When considering a discourse of hate, it is unavoidable that the use of injurious language will cause harm. However, speech is often not recognized as action and the focus legally has been on linguistic meaning of the words rather than the injury that words can cause.

Butler (1997) identifies the problems with assessing which forms of injurious language will offend. Butler (1997) argues that:

> The problem of injurious speech raises the question of which words wound, which representations offend, suggesting that we focus on those parts of language that are uttered, utterable and explicit. And yet, linguistic injury appears to be the effect not only of the words by which one is addressed but the mode of the address itself, a mode—a disposition or conventional bearing—that interpellates and constitutes a subject (2).

We cannot simply define injurious speech within the context of certain words that are harmful. We must, rather, consider the context in which words are exchanged. Consider a relevant issue within the world of English football, the case of a charge of racism against Luis Suarez, a player

for Liverpool FC, for using injurious language toward Patrice Evra, a Manchester United player.

The alleged abuse took place during a visible argument between the two opposing players. For

the sake of this argument, I will only offer that the language Suarez used was a slur against

ethnicity. Suarez defended himself against the charges by claiming that the language he used was

acceptable in his native Uruguay. The Football Association found Suarez guilty of the charge,

finding that the context of the discussion between the players made evidence given by Suarez

unreliable (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2011). To quote the Football Association's report,

"To describe his own behaviour in that way was unsustainable and simply incredible given that

the players were engaged in an acrimonious argument. That this was put forward by Mr. Suarez

was surprising and seriously undermined the reliability of his evidence on other matters" (British

Broadcasting Corporation, 2011). The Football Association found that the context of the

situation in which racial abuse occurred was enough to find the party guilty. As I discussed

earlier, the Supreme Court of Canada found that it was impossible to determine that the

comments were directed at the Roma people housed in the immigration building (Supreme Court

of Canada, 2005). The English Football Association and the Supreme Court of Canada operate

under two different ethical systems.[13] The Supreme Court of Canada makes decisions based on

precedence and the person being prosecuted is considered innocent until proven guilty. Section

319 (1) was not strong enough to convict the perpetrator in the case of *R. v. Krymowski* because

it could not be proven that the perpetrator incited hatred against an identifiable group (Supreme

Court of Canada, 2005). In the case of the Football Association the context of the situation was

enough for successful prosecution.

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[13] This was a comment by M Forrest that helped me arrive at this point on April 21, 2012.

Butler (1997) argues that it is the address of the other that brings one into existence. "One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable" (5). In this sense, oppressive language is more than a precursor to violence; rather, it is in itself a form of violent conduct (Butler, 1997). As a reminder, Dostoyevsky (1914) stated that "anyone who has experienced this power and full license to inflict the greatest humiliation upon another creature made in the image of God will unconsciously lose mastery over his own senses" (229). Language use that is violent is a form of the license that Dostoyevsky (1914) spoke of, that injurious speech that leads to the path of what Mandelstam (trans 1989) calls the path to nonbeing. Individuals that ignore the power of injurious words have taken 'license' over the 'other' that they harm. Alluding back to Freeman (1995), perhaps section 319 (1) of the criminal code of Canada should take into account the perceptions of the victims, rather than focusing entirely on the speech of the perpetrator.

As I interpret Butler (1997), it can be stated that speech is always beyond the control of the individual, meaning that it is not only what we say but how it is received. However, it is often the case that we can argue that we did not intend harm with what we said. Butler's analysis of hate speech traces back to Austin (1962).[14] Austin (1962) used the example of swearing an oath as a speech act, specifically the act of saying "I do (sc. Take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife) —as uttered in the course of a wedding ceremony (5)." Austin (1962) uses that example to note the active nature of language, or as he calls them, speech acts. In Austin's words "The act of 'saying something' in this full normal sense I call, i.e. dub, the performance of a locutionary act" (94). In Austin's view, a speech act occurs at the moment of an utterance but the method of delivery determines the audience's reception of a speech act. In this case, the locution is the

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[14] Austin (1962) was a professor of philosophy and the following is taken from a series of his lectures at Harvard University published under the title *How to do Things with Words.*

statement 'I do' in a wedding ceremony. According to Austin (1962), illocutionary acts are "performances of an act *in* saying something" (99).Taking a vow to be married is an example of doing something with words in that it is the words I do that complete the act of marriage.[15] According to Austin (1962), perlocutionary speech acts are those acts which "may include what in a way are consequences, as when we say 'By doing x I was doing y': we do bring in a greater or less stretch of 'consequences' always, some of which may be 'unintentional'" (106). The wedding vow example is an intention, as in I do agree to marry. Austin (1962) points out that "Here we should say that in saying these words we are doing something—namely, marrying, rather than reporting something, namely that we are marrying" (13). Swearing an oath, as in the act of getting married, has an effect upon the hearer of the words and thus the statement is a performance. However, there is no way to determine if the vow was taken in good faith. Austin (1962) uses the example of Hippolytus when he says "my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not" (10). The hearer may believe the vow as heard in the wedding but the speaker could have been seeking to persuade the audience of the authenticity of the vow while not swearing in good faith.

Speech acts which are racist would be those that contain consequences. They produce effects which depend upon the tone of the argument. If a speech act convinces others to hate based on race, then these speech acts produce longer term effects such as societal oppression and are often more difficult to identify. The recent case involving the use of racist symbolism in Nova Scotia provides a good example of an easily convictable hate crime. Two brothers were found guilty of a hate crime after lighting a cross on the lawn of an African Canadian family. "Crown attorney Darrell Carmichael said that the act of burning a cross is itself an act of hatred

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[15] The italics in this passage are taken from Austin's (1962) original text.

against an identifiable group because of association with the racist group the Ku Klux Klan in the

United States" (CBC News, 2010). In this case, the convictable crime was a physical action

making it more recognizable as an action. In the case *of R. v. Krymowski*, the Supreme Court of

Canada (2005) focussed on a technicality, the meaning of Roma, and ignored the context in

which the alleged racial abuse took place. In this case, the Supreme Court of Canada did not

view the hate speech as an action making it more difficult to prosecute the perpetrator than in the

case of the two brothers in Nova Scotia. In the words of Butler (1997) "such speech reinvokes

and reinscribes a structural relation of domination, and constitutes the linguistic occasion for the

reconstitution of that structural domination" (18). As I will discuss in the next section, speech

acts are difficult to define because the law does not view speech as an act and therefore does not

recognize the consequences.

Current hate speech laws in Canada focus on words that willfully promote violence or

incite hatred against an identifiable group. What does it mean to willfully promote violence or

incite hatred and how can this violence be measured? It would seem that in the Canadian sense,

intent is not the issue when pursuing a conviction under willful promotion of hatred, so it is not

only what the person intends with the use of this utterance that must be considered, but also the

context of the spoken word and the effects it produces on the audience. Current criminal law

provides plenty of examples of convictable offenses where intent is not proven. For example, a

charge of criminal negligence causing death or manslaughter by criminal negligence does not

require that the perpetrator intended their actions, but that they committed the act in the first

place (Canadian Judicial Council, 2012). An individual can only be found guilty of such a charge

if it is proven beyond a reasonable doubt that they committed the act (Canadian Judicial Council,

2012). Hate speech legislation requires that the individual willfully promoted violence or incited

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hatred against an individual or group of individuals (Media Awareness Network, 2011).

According to the criminal code, Butler's (1997) argument that hateful discourse always causes

harm does not hold up legally because it must be proven that the individual espousing hateful

commentary incited violence. This is where current laws directing hate speech become

confusing, because they consider the view of the perpetrator rather than the view of the harmed

individual as pointed out by Freeman (1995). How can we ever prove willful promotion of

violence or incitement of hatred when the law does not consider language as action? Since

language can never be entirely controlled by those who use it, how can we have a law that does

not consider the consequences of language as it affects its target audience? Could we not argue

that willful promotion of violence or incitement of hatred is not the issue in relation to hate

speech, but, rather, the harm that hateful language causes those to whom the words are directed?

Consider a current global media case involving the grounding of the Costa Concordia

ship liner which ran aground off the coast of Italy. Allegedly, the boat went off its regular course,

causing it to run aground because it went too close to shore. As a result of its veering off course,

the ship capsized, causing multiple deaths. The ship's captain has been placed under house arrest

in Italy and is awaiting charges for causing the crash (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2012).

Obviously, the captain did not intend for his actions to cause death, yet, under the law, he is

being held criminally responsible for his actions. This is not the only relevant case where

individuals have been held responsible for their actions despite no proof of intent. Closer to

home, there was a case in Stewiake, Nova Scotia, where a teenage boy was found guilty for

derailing a train. According to his testimony, the boy admitted to using a hammer to destroy a

critical switch on the tracks. These actions caused a derailment that seriously injured 23

passengers (Canadian Television Network, 2002). The defense argued that the boy did not intend

for the train to derail but the court found that his actions were prosecutable under the law

(Canadian Television Network, 2002).

In Canada, intent of an action is not always necessary to prove criminal responsibility.

Butler (1997) states that "Arguments that insist that speech acts are speech rather than conduct,

on the other hand, tend to work in favor of suspending state intervention" (20). We make a

distinction between physical action and verbal action, making words or speech difficult to

prosecute. Butler (1997) argues that speech is often considered separate from conduct, ignoring

speech's performative nature, "Nevertheless, it seems clear that legal precedents for the

curtailment of 'hate speech', broadly construed, are supported by the illocutionary model of hate

speech" (23). Insisting on the gap between speech and conduct makes hate speech difficult to

prove.

Considering the anonymous nature of internet discourse on online news media sites, it

becomes even more difficult to prove that the comments are intended to willfully promote

violence or hatred against an identifiable group. Based on Austin and Butler's analysis of hate

speech, online racist commentary is violence. The anonymous nature of internet discourse makes

it even more difficult to prove that an individual intended to willfully promote violence or incite

hatred against a marginalized group, as they could quite easily be assuming a different identity

and not mean what they say. It is not possible to prove that the contributors on such websites

mean what they say because we are denied the linguistic moment of utterance.

Though these speech acts cannot be considered hate speech under the stringent legal

code, it can be considered that the speech acts cause harm. Living in a free country demands

more than simply saying what you want when you want. Rather, participation in a democracy

requires citizens that can critically and socially analyze what ought to be said, not individuals who can say whatever they feel like saying. Alluding back to Mandelstam (trans 1989) "Freedom of choice presupposes two paths, one leading to some distinct beacon that makes existence meaningful, and the other into the "night and murk of nonbeing"" (266). Though it may be difficult in law to prove willful promotion of violence or hatred toward an identifiable group in relation to hate speech, we must also be made aware that our speech has the power to affect others. The only way to compensate for our lack of control over our own language is to educate ourselves that some utterances include consequences.

In this chapter I have sought to ascertain the difference between acceptable speech and hate speech. In doing so, we have discovered that speech has a performative nature and can be either illocutionary or perlocutionary according to Austin. In order to analyze the content of online mainstream national news media comment boards, it is important to identify the tone of the speaker. Next, I will consider the themes of hate found on online media sites and discuss their importance before analyzing the content of selected comments.

Chapter Eight: Themes and Analysis

Previous studies into online racism have identified common racist themes that occur in

online discourse. Teun van Dijk (1993) suggests that in order to "relate discourse and society, we

need to examine in detail the role of social representations in the mind of social actors" (251).

One would first have to detail any common themes in the discourse to determine a common

discourse of power. Previously, I used Brown's (2009) study of hate discourse to outline the

themes he found in his study. Brown (2009) found that commenters often used theories of

genetic inferiority, charges of 'reverse racism' and portrayals of criminality in their attacks on

perceived marginalized groups. It is worthwhile to note that these themes were found on

websites that are dedicated to hate, and therefore one would expect to find such discourse.

However, upon analyzing comments left in response to a story on a mainstream national news

media website, I found similar themes, as well as other themes contained within the comments.

The most often recurring themes I found were accusations of playing a 'race card'.

Further themes included implication of criminal behavior and implications of a power struggle

between 'whiteness' and the other including the accusation of 'reverse racism'. These themes

often come in the form of criticism of laws that promote equal employment opportunity with

many commenters stating that they were denied employment opportunities in favour of less

qualified members of marginalized groups. The final and most disturbing theme found in online

comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards can only be defined

as 'hate speech', as they incite hatred and willfully promote violence against a marginalized

group.

In order to properly analyze each theme I must first determine the difference between

reasoned arguments and the rhetorical use of persuasion. According to Lynn (2010), rhetoric is a

form of argumentation that seeks to persuade another person to see a certain point of view. It can

be used for both good and bad purposes in a democracy, as Lynn (2010) rightly points out

rhetoric's historical use in persuading ancient Greeks to pursue a democracy rather than an

autocracy. However, Lynn (2010) also stresses that "rhetoric is merely a formulaic means to an

end, equally susceptible to good and evil applications, and perhaps even more attractive to

unscrupulous people" (6). Rhetoric can at once be both good and bad and comes in many forms.

According to Baker (1976), "Rhetoric is indeed artifice, but it is also an art necessary to make

clear a worthy purpose, the art of displaying the truth, language at its best" (15). This research

will be most interested in the 'art' of persuasion. I will use Brooks and Warren (1958) to define

persuasion as "the appeal to emotion, which we call persuasion" (191). Examples of persuasion

can be found in political speeches where the politician creates a speech that is designed to

persuade an audience to vote for that politician. Brooks and Warren (1958) distinguish between

emotion and reason by using the following example: "So Tom Smith votes Republican (or

Democratic) against his long-range interests, just because his grandfather fought under General

Sherman (or General Lee)" (192). In this example, 'Tom Smith' casts an emotional vote, based

on his families' prior association with the Republican Party rather than casting a vote which

serves his best interests, which would be the reasonable vote. Good examples of reasoned

arguments can be found in peer reviewed academic articles, where an article is published but

open to counter debate from other members of the academy. How can the difference between a

reasoned argument and persuasion be determined? Within the realm of philosophy, one can find

some of these answers.

Engel (1994) provides some theoretical background to logic when evaluating the

difference between a reasoned argument and persuasion. According to Engel (1994) there are

certain characteristics one must search for when evaluating an argument for reason. Engel (1994) says that the reasons used to support an argument are known as premises while conclusions are derived from those reasons. Engel (1994) provides an example of a rational argument in the following classic example:

> All men are mortal.
> Socrates is a man.
> Socrates is mortal (20).

In this example, the premise is that "All men are mortal." The conclusion that "Socrates is mortal" is directly derived from the evidence that "Socrates is a man" in light of the premise about all men. One could find the elements of a premise and conclusion in many arguments that are not necessarily good arguments, so a premise and conclusion alone does not define a good argument because some of the elements of an argument may be considered suspect. Engel (1994) says "an element is suspect if it carries more weight than it is capable of carrying" (27). According to Engel (1994), these 'suspect elements' often contain verbiage or excess words that distract from the meaning of the argument. Engel (1994) stresses that in order to analyze any argument, one must analyze the argument in question for validity and soundness; "validity refers to the correctness with which a conclusion has been inferred from its premises." (32). If an argument contains validity and soundness, it can be considered a reasonable argument. If the argument is missing these key components it becomes fallacious which means the argument is unsound.

Engel (1994) reminds us that by examining language for ambiguity and vagueness one can determine whether an argument is sound. Ambiguous and vague language can lead to misinterpretation of the text, where after the first reading the argument and logic can seem

sound, but upon deeper reading, it becomes clear that the writer (or speaker) has not used a sound premise to arrive at a conclusion. However, despite it now being clear the difference between a sound argument and an unsound argument, it is still necessary to differentiate between reason and opinion, and for that purpose, I will now turn to Deleuze and Guattari (1994).

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) state that "philosophy is the discipline that involves *creating* concepts… Nietzsche laid down the task of philosophy when he wrote, [Philosophers] "must no longer accept concepts as a gift, nor merely purify and polish them, but first *make* and *create* them, present them and make them convincing" (5).[16] The philosopher is not concerned with rearticulating past arguments, but, rather, with creating new ideas or concepts. How does the creation of a concept or idea differ from the creation of an opinion? Deleuze and Guattari (1994) claim that "The three characteristics by which philosophy was related to the Greek city [Athens] were, precisely, the society of friends, the table of immanence, and the confrontation of opinions" (145). Discussion became the art by which this table of friends arrived at clarity, by sharing and challenging each other's opinions. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) define opinion as "an abstract thought, and insult plays an effective role in this abstraction because opinion expresses the general functions of particular states. It extracts an abstract quality from perception and a general power from affection: in this sense all opinion is already political" (145). Deleuze and Guattari (1994) use an example of serving of cheese at a dinner table in the following:

> Doxa is a type of proposition that arises in the following way: in a given perceptive-
> affective lived situation (for example, some cheese is brought to the dinner table),
> someone extracts a pure quality from it (for example, a foul smell); but, at the same time
> as he abstracts the quality, he identifies himself with a generic subject experiencing a

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[16] Italics in this passage are taken from the original text.

common affection (the society of those who detest cheese)—competing as such with

those who love it, usually on the basis of another quality (145).

Opinions, thus, are formed from a certain taste, and in this case, formed quickly based on

a single quality. The goal of philosophy is to create concepts which are never as closed as an

opinion can be because opinions can only be changed if someone is willing to engage with the

other side of the debate. The only way to achieve this debate is through the dialectic. But,

opinion alone does not meet the requirements of the dialectic when it remains unchallenged. The

comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards must be examined for

opinion and persuasive language, those devices that pull at the emotions to achieve their

objectives.

In order to analyze the persuasive methods of comments left in online mainstream

national news media comment boards, I will be asking the following questions that have been

adapted from Brundage and Lahey (2007):

- What is the writer's overall rhetorical mode (personal, persuasive, creative, and so
  on)?

- Who is its intended audience?

- What is the author's controlling idea?

- What are the author's arguments/reasons?

- Does the author imply or presume things about the subject that are not explicitly
  stated?

- How did the author organize the information and what strategies and patterns does he
  or she use to present the information?

In this section, I have found that arguments should be analyzed for reason to determine whether a conclusion is sound. Next, I will discuss each theme in detail before proceeding with a critical discourse analysis of the comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards. My intent is to provide teachers with analytical tools to engage students in the study of online discourse, providing a platform for critical and citizenship education. I will blank out all community identifiers using the following symbol, ███████. In addition, I will use the following symbol, *****, to block language which would be considered overtly racist or refers to communities or individuals in a racist tone. I will begin my analysis by discussing the first theme found in comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards, which is the playing of a so called 'race card'.

Theme One: The Race Card

 'Playing the race card' was the most common statement to be found in the initial analysis of online commentary to media stories. This example epitomizes much of the sentiment to be found in online commentary:

> The ever-effective race card. If you are non-white and something doesn't quite work out the way you want it, just pull it out and play it. It will set whites everywhere quivering in their boots and usually get the media to accept it unquestioningly. You can even murder 8 co-workers and use it. The media will then turn the murderer into a victim and smear the victims.

The writer of this particular comment is implying that groups of "non-white" individuals are in possession of an all encompassing 'race card' which ultimately influences the media. This 'race card' turns up in numerous comments found on online mainstream national news media

comment boards in response to stories dealing with marginalized groups. Comack and Bowness (2010) in their analysis of online commentary found on the Canadian Broadcast Corporation website claim that when a member of the dominant sector of society accuses a marginalized group of playing a race card they are in actuality playing a card of their own, the "card of racial privilege" (34).

Instead of discussing historical claims that may have lead to perceived racist acts, writers using online mainstream national news media comment boards are more inclined to deny racism's existence and instead accuse marginalized groups of increasing their power by perpetually playing a 'race card' that ignores responsibility within the community. What's more, the existence of the 'race card' is largely accepted amongst the large majority of anonymous commentators. The following comment received almost unanimous agreement amongst fellow comment board participants: "Ahhhh, when you don't get your way pull out the Ace….the race card." 118 users of online mainstream national news media comment boards agreed with this comment versus 4 who disagreed. This all begs the question, what is a 'race card?'

Comack and Bowness (2010) use Foucault to claim that "discourses are imbued with power" (2). In Foucault's (1979) own words "It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (100). The term 'race card' has origins in politics. Vautier (2009) notes that the term 'use a race card' has been used prominently in numerous political campaigns in the UK in the post World War II era. Vautier (2009) notes that:

The race card might be one of the last resorts but it is also assumed to be a trump card. As a number of political analysts and academics have noted, it has been deemed vital to

several political campaigns in the post-Second World War era in the United Kingdom

since Peter Griffiths's campaign in Smethwick in 1964 (127).[17]

Since the initial use of the term during this political campaign, 'playing a race card' has featured

more often in subsequent history. 'Using a race card' is often associated with the charge that a

marginalized group is trying to gain an advantage unethically by utilizing past oppression to gain

a competitive advantage in the modern world (Vautier, 2009). Anyone who has ever played the

card game of trumps knows that the trump card beats any card laid on the table, no matter how

high the other cards that have been played are valued. Indeed, the only card that can beat a trump

card is a higher trump card. In this sense, the implication that someone is playing a 'race card' is

that they are using a card that cannot be beaten by any philosophical argument. Politically, a

'race card' cannot be defeated because it is played as the highest trump.

Vautier (2009) notes that to 'play a race card' is often analyzed as a mode of radicalized

appeal but never analyzed as a speech act or event. Comack and Bowness (2010) view the

'playing of a race card' as a contributing factor to what they call "the discourse of denial" (40).

The discourse of denial refers to those modes of discussion that alleviate guilt on the part of the

dominant sector of society, upholding that certain acts that occur in society have nothing to do

with racism, but, rather, they are perceived as racist by a group of society that does not recognize

that oppression and racism belong to a turbulent past (Comack & Bowness, 2010). Denial of

racism as an issue in modern society is linked to the idea that we are living in a post-racial

society. Jiwani (2009) links the denial of racism to power rather than to the idea of a post-racial

society. Jawani (2009) argues that this is a "power that is grounded in a racialized and gendered

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[17] According to Vautier (2009), "Enoch Powell is seen as the key architect of the race-card tactics in that campaign whose legacy has shaped subsequent campaigns" (127). Powell made numerous speeches for the conservative government in England against immigration.

economy and reproduced in the media landscape that surrounds us" (738). The discourse of

denial is linked to the idea that racism is an act of individuals and has no connection to the larger

societal structure (Comack & Bowness, 2010).

Vautier (2009) draws a line between the accusation of 'playing a race card' and the

reality of the anxiety from the dominant sector of society that such claims protect. "Racist

discourse, racist logic and the assumed realities of popular racisms linked to the white anxieties

remain in place for future use" (Vautier, 2009, 124). Accusing someone of playing a 'race card'

is in fact a defense mechanism that protects the dominant sector's identities from recognizing a

discriminatory society. Claiming the use of a 'race card' is another method by which 'whiteness'

protects itself from those who would attack the privilege and power enjoyed by the dominant

sector of society. The 'race card' is not a card being played, but rather a counter method used

against those that would point out inequalities in a perceived-to-be equal society (Vautier, 2009).

Linguistically, accusing one of 'playing a race card' is an act of protection against the notion of

inequality. By making these accusations, the dominant sector of society is acting to protect a

position of power over the dominant discourse of that society.

In order to give context for the following passages it seems necessary to give some detail

of the original story from which I found these comments. The story involved a protest against the

opening of a road which was a short cut around a construction site for some White Caucasian

families in an area close to a marginalized community. The marginalized community perceived

this to be discriminatory and argued that if they had to wait in the traffic caused by the

construction then everyone should have to wait. These excerpts are all taken from a mainstream

Canadian national news media website. After analyzing comments about this story on a comment

board which contained 204 comments in total, I found 30 references to the playing of a 'race

card.' The following are a selection of examples taken from this online mainstream national

news media comment boards:

> WOW! I wish I was **** so I could cry racism every time my cereal got soggy too. Idiots!

> Once again, cry the race card! Give me a break! If you want to be treated equally – start acting as equals and stop assuming that everything that is inconvenient is intentionally done to single out races. Rediculous!

> Who in the hell made this moronic decision?
>
> If someone even disagrees with a ***** person on an issue they haul out the race card.
>
> Whats most ridiculous here is the way HRM capitulated like a beaten dog. Show a little backbone and stop cowtowing simply for political correctness.
>
> In reference to an earlier comment. One would have to have credibility in the first place to lose it.

The first comment is missing key ingredients that form a rational argument. For example,

what qualifications exist on the part of the writer that enables him/her to brand an entire race of

people as idiots? Upon analysis of this text, there are ingredients missing that would allow us to

understand the evidence for this grandiose claim. The premise of the argument seems to be that

an individual or group of individuals can use a 'race card' to achieve their political objective.

The writer uses the metaphor of "soggy cereal" to illuminate the point. This use of language is an

example of figurative speech. The writer is using two seemingly unrelated topics and forming a

connection, in this case, "soggy cereal" is compared to perceptions of racism. This is an example

of a metaphorical use of language, which is an example of figurative speech. According to

Gwynn (1998), "a metaphor is a direct comparison between two unlike things" (14) Racism and

"soggy cereal" have no linguistic association yet the writer of this comment relates them to make

his/her point. However, logically speaking, there is no evidence provided which would allow the

reader to reach the same conclusion as the author.

The use of metaphor in the argument would indicate that the method of writing is meant

to be both creative and persuasive. The use of metaphor distracts the reader from the lack of

evidence to support the conclusion. The statement is missing the necessary reasoning that

informs the conclusion. The statement presumes that the reader knows the meaning of 'playing a

race card' without offering any information that clarifies how a 'race card' was used. The order

of the comment is designed to offer the maximum impact, leading with "WOW!" and ending

with the grandiose statement, "idiots!" The use of exclamation points adds emphasis to the

statements. There is an implied tone in the statement. Beginning with "WOW" to express the

author's disbelief at the situation, he/she then uses demeaning and belittling language in the

follow up statement, "I wish I was **** so I could cry racism every time my cereal got soggy

too. Idiots!" The metaphor distracts from the overall message which demeans the cause of a

marginalized group and trivializes a perceived injustice. The use of language is mocking to the

cause of a marginalized group, comparing a history of oppression to "soggy cereal." Overall,

without further information and evidence, it is impossible to classify this statement as anything

other than an opinion designed to persuade its audience, as the most basic components that

formulate an argument are missing. The word that is blanked out is a racial indicator, so the

comment is hateful because it trivializes the history of oppression faced by that marginalized

group.

The second comment has a similar premise to the first one, that a group of people have

used a 'race card' to gain an advantage in society. The use of exclamation points in the initial

two statements, "cry the race card!" and "Give me a break!", add emphasis to the author's views

against the use of a 'race card'. The author then embarks on an analysis of equality, claiming that

in order to be considered equal, marginalized groups must stop assuming that every

inconvenience marginalized groups face is racist. The rhetorical mode of this statement seems to

be persuasive and reads like an opinion. The text does not discuss what "equality" means, and as

the meaning of equality can mean different things to different people, this use of the term

"equality" is defined by this individual in a personal way, one which we as readers are meant to

understand. The author concludes that the situation is "rediculous" without offering the reader

any evidence to support that statement.[18] What does it mean to act as equals? What is the writer

implying about equality, and what evidence does the writer provide that indicates that current

society is equal?

In addition, the language the author uses can be considered demeaning in a similar way to

the first comment. The statement begins with "Once again, cry the race card." The use of the

word "cry" is implying an almost babyish response from the marginalized group in question.

"Give me a break!" illustrates the author's utter contempt for a marginalized group having what

he/she perceives to be the audacity to point out injustice. The discussion about equality ignores

historical and continuing racism before labeling the situation as "rediculous." Again, the author

is trivializing the struggle of a marginalized group against oppression. There are large evidential

gaps in the rhetorical statements of the author and a philosophical discussion about equality is

necessary before classifying a situation as "rediculous." As with the previous statement, the

author uses powerful statements such as "Give me a break!" and "rediculous!" but offers

absolutely no evidence to support a reasoned argument, and for this reason we can only classify

this statement as an unsavory example of persuasive opinion.

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[18] Again, the spelling of "ridiculous" is a spelling mistake that reflects the original text and is not an error in this document.

The final statement again leads with a powerful premise: "Who in the hell made this moronic decision?" However, looking further into the statement, there is no information the reader can utilize to define why the decision is "moronic." Again, the author uses the 'race card' to back up the initial statement but fails to elaborate upon the meaning of the 'race card'. The mode the author chooses would seem to be both creative and persuasive, as the statement contains both simile and metaphor. Having already defined metaphor, I will use Gwynn (1998) to define simile as "a comparison using like, as, or than as a connective device" (15). The author uses a simile when he/she states that the "HRM capitulated **like** a beaten dog" and uses metaphorical language when he/she tells the HRM to stop "cowtowing" simply for "political correctness." [19] The concepts of "political correctness" and "cowtowing" have no direct relationship. The statement finishes by implying a lack of credibility on the part of those who are perceived to have used a 'race card' but does not offer any evidence to support this claimed lack of credibility. Again, the tone of the writing trivializes the struggle against oppression and mocks "political correctness" by suggesting that being politically correct is a form of "cowtowing." "Cowtowing" is used in a creative way that distracts from the lack of evidence to support a reasonable argument. Furthermore, the author dismisses the perceived oppression by labeling it as "moronic" and goes so far as to question the credibility of the marginalized group in question. As with the previous two examples, there is no evidence that supports the conclusion; thus, this statement is another example of persuasive opinion that contains an unsavory and hateful viewpoint.

As I discussed earlier, Comack and Bowness (2010) claim that accusing someone of 'playing a race card' is an attempt to regain the power of the 'race card' because the accusation

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[19] The author seems to mean kowtowing which according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary means "to show sb [somebody] in authority too much respect and be willing to obey them" (715).

assumes the same power as the 'race card'. To illustrate this point, I will use an analogy of the simple card game trumps. I grew up playing numerous versions of the game of trumps and the only clear rule in a game of trumps is that no card beats a trump except a higher trump. By accusing people of playing a 'race card' the writer is attempting to neutralize the power of a metaphorical trump card by playing a higher trump card. These comments can be viewed from a critical discourse analyst's view as an attempt to reclaim power for the dominant group because each of these writers imply that power is being taken away from White Caucasian people when a 'race card' is played.

Borrowing from Richardson's (2007) list of issues that critical discourse analysis deals with, these comments are examples of ideological uses of language and involve power relations between ethnicities in Canada, as the commenters are attempting to retain power over discourse for members of the dominant sector of society by using unsavory and hateful language to trivialize the history of oppression experienced by marginalized groups. These passages deal in absolutes and assume the readers know what is meant by a 'race card'. Indeed, borrowing further from Richardson (2007), we can see that the correct interpretation of the text relies upon culturally constructed knowledge and power-relations in society. The correct meaning of these texts can only be ascertained by assuming that the audience has the correct cultural knowledge to determine that a 'race card' refers to an attempt to gain an advantage. However, as we have seen earlier, accusing individuals of 'playing a race card' is an attempt by the user of the accusation to regain any perceived advantage. If critical discourse analysis is correct and all discourse is about power, then accusing a marginalized group of playing a 'race card' is an attempt to regain control after a perceived loss of power.

Next, I will discuss the second theme I found in comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards, portraying the 'other' as criminal.

Theme 2: Portraying the 'other' as criminal

Many research studies have been conducted into the effect of national news media depictions of marginalized groups to perceptions of those marginalized groups by the viewers. The national news media has often been proven a negative influence to people's perceptions of marginalized groups in society. Dixon (2007) notes that "Communication researchers, psychologists and other scholars have for years contended that exposure to mass media imagery may have an impact on viewers' constructions of social reality" (271).

As you will see, comments that label marginalized groups as criminal can be found within commentary on media sites when the commenters are responding to a story involving a marginalized community. Is it reasonable to label a community as having rampant crime? What informs this perception? The following is a discussion of common assumptions about marginalized groups, specifically, the labeling of groups as criminal by the dominant sector of society. I will consider what informs these views before analyzing how these views contribute to hate posted on online mainstream national news media comment boards.

We live in a world, no matter how difficult it is to admit it, of stereotypes. In Henry and Tator's (2009) analysis of Canadian media, they found that news stories were often found to have racialized themes including "immigration, crime, cultural differences, poverty, unemployment, tensions among groups, and discrimination against racialized minority

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communities" (712).[20] The national news media are focusing on stories that they know will sell

newspapers or their broadcasts. One of the major failings of modern scholars is neglecting to

analyze how these pervading themes in the national news media impact the perceptions of the

marginalized groups that they portray (Henry & Tator, 2009). Henry and Tator (2009) contend

that national media culture is a representation of societal norms and customs and the data I have

collected seems to support this claim.

Mastro, Knight Lapinski, Kopacz and Behm-Morawitz (2009) conducted a study to

expose the depictions of race and criminal behavior on television broadcasts. Mastro et al (2009)

found that "Analyses of television news consistently indicate that Black males are

overrepresented as perpetrators and underrepresented as victims, compared to both their White

male counterparts on TV as well as real world Department of Justice arrest reports" (616). The

representation of the African American as criminal is not a new phenomena. Dixon (2007) has

conducted similar studies arriving at the same conclusion. Dixon (2007) claims that this

stigmatization has far reaching implications in that it causes members of a society to associate

behaviors seen on television with members of a marginalized group. The result of this study

found that heavy news viewers were more likely to believe that an unidentified suspect was in

fact, an African American male (Dixon, 2007). Dixon (2007) even goes so far as to state that

"Perhaps the news over represents African American criminals to such a large degree that the

cognitive association between Blacks and lawbreaking is perpetually reinforced" (284). Though

written from an American perspective, the study conducted in Canada by Mastro et al (2009)

came to similar conclusions. Mastro et al's (2009) study found that White Caucasian males are

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[20] This is the term Tator and Henry (2009) use, as I stated earlier, I have chosen to use the term marginalized
community throughout this research.

more likely to be sympathetic to a White Caucasian male suspect depicted on the news than to an African Canadian male.

The news is just as culpable for portrayals of communities as criminal as the individuals who espouse these views. It seems illogical to label an entire community as criminal; yet, this theme is found often when reading through comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards. Comments linking race to criminal behavior contribute to a discourse of power, making communities culpable for the actions of a few individuals. More to the point, they deflect from the initial claims of racism, implying that communities should deal with their own problems before claiming any form of societal discrimination. Fueled by the national news media, it is very possible that those who leave such comments on online comment boards believe that their statement is true. If all we see about certain communities are tales of crime then people will connect crime to that community. As Lund (2010) states, "although most Canadians do not condone blatant racist behavior, widespread systemic racism is part of our societal reality" (230).

There is an attitude found on online mainstream national news media comment boards that members of marginalized groups are lazy and unwilling to correct their situations. This attitude implies what Lund (2010) labels systemic racism. However, whether we recognize negative depictions in the national news media as systemic racism is another matter altogether. Prior to the release of Lund's (2010) study on systemic racism in Canada he was attacked by the national news media, even going so far as to link his study with white supremacy, the very concept that his study was trying to denounce.

Within the comments on the same news story about the racial tension over a road closure I analyzed for the 'race card' there were 11 examples of comments that portrayed the 'other' as

criminal found amongst the 204 comments in the same story analyzed above. The following is a

list of chosen comments that portray the 'other' as criminal:

> crime rate?? well hmm hrm [Halifax Regional Municipality] has a population of around/over 360,000 ███████ has 3700. so round around 10 x pop. hrm to ██████ (community name). i wonder what the per capita crime rates is.
>
> Google search ██████████, and what do we find:
>
> Aug 10 - "An 18-year-old ████████ man has been sentenced to three years in prison for having a loaded .22-calibre semi-automatic handgun."
>
> Aug 8 - "RCMP responded to the corner of █████████ and ███████████ in ███████ last evening at 8:30 P.M. to a report of several shots fired."
>
> Aug 6 - "48-year-old ███████████ man will face drugs and weapons charges
>
> Aug 4 - "the sentencing hearing for the young █████████ man who shot him. The young man was convicted in March of attempting to ███████████ on Nov. 11, 2008, and six other charges related to the shooting"
>
> July 21 - "Nineteen-year-old ██████████████ of ███████████ is scheduled to appear in Dartmouth Provincial Court today charged with drug trafficking."
>
> May 29 - "██████████████████████, was arraigned in Dartmouth provincial court. A 17-year-old boy, whose identity is protected under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, appeared in Halifax youth court.
>
> Officers found the Cadillac in █████████ with four bullet holes in it. Police don't believe the driver was injured."
>
> Mar 26 - "Members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Halifax District along with Halifax Regional Fire Services responded to a suspicious house fire at 53 ████████████████████████ last evening at 10:40 P.M."
>
> Feb 8 - "RCMP Major Crime Unit began their investigation into another suspicious death in the small community."
>
> I could go on, but my point is that for a comminuty of 3700 people, ithey have far bigger problems to worry about than a crappy little logging road. It's stuff like above that would have me protesting in the streets, and taking them back. This idiotic event gets this community together - not the rampant crime, lack of reporting crimes, the lack of an acceptable high school graduation rate, the attacks on the police.. No no.. why do anything about that? [22]

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[22] Each blacked out section here denotes the name of a community. The commenter has conducted a Google search on a community and lists a group of headlines found as a result of that Google search.

This is pretty sad, to see people protest on a road that is not the private road, why didn't they protest there, oh yes that right, nobody would see them, so they decide to block a major road for the media publictiy of it. These folks have step back fifty years from where we are, and have brought themselves more division and hatred in teh community then before and should be ashamed of themselves, maybe next time we can have possible protests about the crime, drugs, vilonece in the area, not about getting a new bridge is an incovience for you, because some land owner wont give a key to veryone, because you know why, as soon as something happens on that road, the land owner would be lible for it, and thats another money grab in the making. On a unrealted note, I actually stop by today to see what all the fuss is about, first I like to thank the RCMP for taking part in teh demostraion by blocking the road with their cars for the people protesting, thanks, good to see you are looking out for everyone, and second that sign they held should have read "█████ or White we can all go around, unless you're one of our friends tehn we'll let you pass" as I saw happen a few times in my little stop, Racsim you call, I ask against who, the █████ or the whites? Anybody affected by this protest should get a lawyer and go after both the Community and the RCMP in my eyes they are both guilty

The first argument which portrays the 'other' as criminal is an interesting one because counter to our previous examples of online commentary, this author does provide the audience with evidence to back up his/her claim in the form of a series of crimes committed in the community. Previous comments were much easier to analyze as they made grandiose claims without evidence to support those claims. Since the author provides 'evidence' to support the claim, the rhetorical mode of this statement is persuasive. However, does the presence of 'evidence' in this statement mean it is a valid argument? In order to comment on the validity of the argument it is critical to consider the validity of the evidence. The writer alludes to population and per capita crime rate yet fails to provide the per capita crime rate for the Halifax Regional Municipality in comparison to the anonymous community. Can the reader accept that the crime rate per capita is larger in this anonymous sector of the Halifax Regional Municipality than the rest of the city? Without the contrasting evidence it would be a leap to suggest that the evidence provided by the author is sound evidence.

The author's controlling idea of the statement is that this community should be more concerned about the crime rate in the community based on the Google list of crime he/she provides. The language is belittling, especially in the opening passage "crime rate?? well hmm." The author seems to be assuming that the reader knows the answer to the crime rate of this anonymous community. Furthermore, the author insults this marginalized community by presuming that crime is not a concern of the community and assumes that the crime rate is higher than the rest of the city based on a Google search. The author also insults the community by stating that crime goes unreported. Even if there are cases of unreported crime in this community, which the author presumes, are members of this community the only ones who do not report crime in the greater city? Let us consider the significant societal problem of spousal abuse. According to a report compiled by Statistics Canada (2006), "only 28% of victims of spousal violence turned to police for help" (6). It is a fallacy to presume that communities of the dominant sector of society in Canada do not also have crime that goes unreported. This would seem to be a generalization about the community which the provided evidence does not support. The organization of the statement follows the principles of a logical philosophical argument, beginning with a premise, providing evidence and ending with a conclusion, yet the conclusion is fallacious because the author made assumptions based on 'evidence' that does not hold up to critique.

The final portion of the statement provides the reader with insight into the fallacious nature of the statement, because the author claims a "lack of reporting crimes, lack of an acceptable high school graduation rate and attacks on police." Nowhere in the evidence provided are attacks on police, a lack of reporting crime and an unacceptable graduation rate mentioned. The author's use of language is not only insulting, but also deeply harmful, hateful and unsavory.

The evidence does not support the claims of the author that the community is rampant with crime and does not care about these issues, nor does it support the claim that these are issues the community deals with. Though this statement may attempt to persuade, considered critically it can only be referred to as a fallacious conclusion which the evidence does not support and is not a reasonable argument.

The second statement is difficult to comprehend because of a number of grammatical mistakes. However, the author again suggests that the community protest against crime and suggest that they should be ashamed, going so far as to claim that "These folks have step back fifty years from where we are." Where exactly does the author think we are? I am unclear as to the possibility of legal recourse which the author claims people should take against the RCMP and the community at the end of the statement. It is difficult to ascertain the author's rhetorical mode, arguments or reasoning and pattern for presenting the information. This argument lacks a premise, evidence and is therefore a series of claims that arrive at the conclusion of a possible lawsuit. Furthermore, the statement trivializes the struggles against oppression that marginalized communities face. I would argue that statements containing hateful and trivializing content like the ones above set society back in terms of civil rights; it is not the protest against perceived oppression that does so. This statement certainly cannot be classified as a reasonable argument and is an opinion piece, albeit a difficult one to understand.

According to Richardson (2007) critical discourse analysis concerns itself with social problems including crime. In the case of the comments above we gain evidence that supports the claims of previous studies that marginalized groups have been criminalized. Perceptions expressed by the authors of both of the comments listed above indicate that the community in question should be more concerned about the perceived criminal activity in that community than

any perceived discriminatory act. This viewpoint highlights another concern of critical discourse analysis; that society is shaped by discourse and power over discourse (Richardson, 2007). As noted in the literature above, marginalized groups are often perceived to be criminally active because criminal activity in marginalized communities is excessively reported in the news (Tator, 2009). This societal problem may be informing the two viewpoints contained within the example texts taken from comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards. The danger of such comments is that they reinforce an already stereotypical view of marginalized communities. Both authors attempt to convince the reader to believe their rhetoric and in doing so, use language ideologically. The reception and social effect of such commentary could be the continuation of social stigmatization that convinces readers of the criminality of marginalized communities.

Next, I will discuss the third theme that I found on online mainstream national news media comment boards, charges of 'reverse racism'. 'Reverse racism' is a common theme to found in the discourse of hate found on online mainstream national news media comment boards and are often attacks upon equal opportunity legislations.

Theme Three: 'Reverse Racism' and Equal Opportunity

Accusations of 'reverse racism' are common on online mainstream national news media comment boards. Take for example, this quote found on a popular media website: "I am Caucasian and am offended by being called Whites. This is a racist term please stop offending me." The author of this comment is implying that White is a racist term, or a form of 'reverse racism'. However, the comment itself is indicative of a certain ignorance of the meaning of the term Caucasian. Caucasian is often assumed to mean people of white colour, although the

official definition does not refer to colour. People with white skin are not, in fact, the only

members of the Caucasian race.

In fact, according to Painter (2003), the term Caucasian "connects to the Caucasus, the

440,000 square kilometers of land separating the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The two ranges

of the Caucasus Mountains cross the region running roughly east to west" (2). In fact, the term

Caucasian refers to a "traditional race division of humankind, marked by fair to dark skin,

straight to tightly curly hair, and light to very dark eyes, and originally inhabiting parts of

Europe, parts of North Africa, western Asia and India" (retrieved from dictionary.com).

Caucasian does not refer only to white skinned people, but rather, a people from a certain region

of the world including those with multiple different skin types. Painter (2003) argues that the

origins of the white race, Caucasian, lie in slavery and the need to differentiate from the 'other'.

Caucasian does not refer specifically to white skinned people; it is a claimed word that

anthropologically has a very different meaning. The correct use of the anthropological term

should be White Caucasian, as this use avoids offending others members of the Caucasian group

who are left out of this commentator's definition.

'Reverse racism' or reverse discrimination is a relatively new phenomenon. According to

Fish (2000) "Whites once set themselves apart from others and claimed privileges for themselves

while denying them to others. Now, on the basis of race, blacks are claiming special status and

reserving for themselves privileges they deny to others. Isn't one as bad as the other? The answer

is no" (15). According to Fish (2000), claims of 'reverse racism' are often used to argue against

affirmative action legislation.

As I will demonstrate in my analysis, claims of 'reverse racism' are found in online commentary left on online mainstream national news media comment boards, many of which focus on affirmative action legislation. Affirmative action began in Canada during civil rights movements. According to the Federal Governments labour archives, the 1950's and 1960's saw the first forms of affirmative action, when it became illegal to discriminate against a potential employee on the basis of gender, religion or race. With the enacting of the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1977, federal and federally regulated bodies were protected on the basis of ten grounds: "race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, marital status, family status, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted. Sexual orientation was added to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in 1996" (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012). In the 1980's, the employment equity act was passed with a goal to achieve equity in the workforce for a multicultural Canada (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012). According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2012):

> employment equity refers to an on-going planning process used by an employer to:
>
> - identify and eliminate barriers in an organization's employment procedures and policies;
>
> - put into place positive policies and practices to ensure the effects of systemic barriers are eliminated; and
>
> - ensure appropriate representation of "designated group" members throughout their workforce.
>
> The goal of Employment Equity is to:
>
> - eliminate employment barriers for the four designated groups identified in the Employment Equity Act : women, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal people, members of visible minorities;
>
> - remedy past discrimination in employment opportunities and prevent future barriers;

- improve access and distribution throughout all occupations and at all levels for members of the four designated groups;

- foster a climate of equity in the organization.

The argument that some members of the dominant sector of society make in regards to employment equity is that the legislation creates an advantage for marginalized groups. Fish (2000) draws some distinctions between affirmative action and the benefits offered to marginalized populations. He notes that the legislation has allowed some groups to claim 'reverse racism'. However, Fish (2000) claims that such arguments ignore the historical context of racism. Fish (2000) states that "reverse racism is a cogent description of affirmative action only if one considers the cancer of racism to be morally and medically indistinguishable from the therapy we apply to it" (16). Fish (2000) goes on to elaborate on his metaphor, stating that if an individual is fighting against cancer they apply the strongest medicine possible to eradicate the problem. He is arguing that employment equity is the strongest possible cure after a lifetime of discrimination directed at marginalized groups. While there is an advantage for marginalized groups in certain contexts in regards to employment equity, the advantage is justified when considering decades of mistreatment, especially to African Americans who were subject to slavery (Fish, 2000). Those who claim that employment equity treats White Caucasian people "unfairly" are rewriting history. Fish (2000) states that:

> The work done by the adverb "unfairly," which suggests two more or less equal parties, one of whom has been unjustly penalized by an incompetent umpire. But blacks have not simply been treated unfairly; they have been subjected first to decades of slavery, and then to decades of second-class citizenship, wide-spread legalized discrimination, economic deprivation, and cultural stigmatization (17).

Fish (2000) notes that proponents of 'reverse racism' often claim that there needs to be a level

playing field for all members of a democracy, stating that:

> The argument usually takes the form of saying it is undemocratic to give one class of
>
> citizens advantages at the expense of other citizens; the truly democratic way is to have a
>
> level playing field to which everyone has a fair and equal chance to succeed on the basis
>
> of his or her merit (17).

This argument assumes that playing fields were level to begin with, but as Fish (2000) argues,

due to historical and continuing discrimination, there has never been a level playing field.

Employment equity is the best tool modern society has to even the historical playing field after

generations of discrimination. Fish (2000) has shown that the argument for 'reverse racism' does

not take into account generations of oppression, and until such time as this continuing oppression

is eradicated, employment equity will be a necessary bridge to make up historical gaps.

I found 12 instances of commentary about 'reverse racism' in the 204 comments

contained in the same story I used for the previous themes. The following is a selection of

comments that deal with issues of 'reverse racism':

> Not being allowed to go down a certain road in life because of your color. that's not
> racism, that's "Affirmative Action" I met a similiar locked door while trying to get into
> the RCMP back in the early 90s. However several less qualified Non-White persons, got
> a key to a great life and benefits.

> This smacks of reverse racism with bigotry against white people. Not allowing those
> people who needed the road access because they were white? Unbelievable. The *****
> people there sound like a bunch of racists. Can you imagine if it was a road owned by
> white people and mostly black people were denied access ? This is a sad day for Canada
> that racism of any kind was allowed to happen officially. If those who own the road are
> worried about wear and tear or have other concerns, they should have instead given
> temporary permits and charged a toll. They could avoid all this controversy and make

some money too. Those who want to use the road would have to spend extra gas money going around the lengthy detour anyway so why not give it to the road owners. Toll roads are not uncommon

In the first comment for analysis the author implies that affirmative action is racist. The logic of the argument is as follows: I applied for a job, less qualified people received the job over me and therefore, I was discriminated against. The writing mode is persuasive as the writer is attempting to convince the audience to see his/her point of view. However, again we can point to a lack of evidence that supports the conclusion that affirmative action is discriminatory. For example, what proof does the author offer that he/she was more qualified than the individuals that received the job offer over him/her? The author is presuming that he/she was the most qualified person for the job and the reader is left lacking information that proves the claimed qualifications. Could there not have been other factors that informed the author's inability to get a job with the RCMP? The use of language belittles the qualifications of those "Non-White people" who got the job. Is the writer implying that he/she was more qualified because he/she is White? We, as readers, are offered no information to support this view. The use of a "locked door" metaphor attempts to evoke an emotive response from the readers based on the author's perceived injustice. The use of language is not only presumptuous about the author's qualifications to work for the RCMP but also insulting and hateful to those who did get the job. Without proof to support the statement, we must therefore conclude that this statement is an opinion that is lacking supporting evidence and not a reasonable argument.

The second statement claims "reverse racism" and "bigotry against white people" as a controlling idea for the statement premised on the idea that the marginalized community is disallowing White Caucasian people access to a road. The writer even claims that this is

sanctioned by Canada as a nation, making the perceived discrimination all the more distasteful.

The author does offer a solution to the situation in the form of a toll road that is inclusive to

everyone. This proposed solution to a perceived problem is an example of persuasive writing

because the author is making statements that are designed to support his/her statement. The

pattern of the information is delivered by first claiming "reverse racism" that is sanctioned

officially before moving on to propose a solution. However, the initial claim of 'reverse racism'

is suspect, as there is critical evidence lacking that is required for the reader to support that point

of view. Was the road blocked because the people were "white" as the writer claims? Nowhere

in the text or indeed, in the initial story is there any mention of purposely withholding access to a

road based on the whiteness of the individuals wishing to use that road. The statement is missing

sound evidence; we need more than the denial of road access to conclude that this is an example

of "bigotry" against "white people." The author uses powerful shock terms such as "bigotry" and

"racism" to sensationalize the point, adding emphasis to the point by expressing contempt when

stating that the situation is "unbelievable." The author also tries to use a counter example to

support his/her claims of "reverse racism" when he/she says "Can you imagine if it was a road

owned by white people and mostly black people were denied access ?" This is a rhetorical

question since the text does not offer a solution to the question. The author has left us no choice

but to conclude that the statement is fallacious and offers an exaggerated conclusion based on the

evidence. In addition, the statement is harmful because it trivializes the struggles of marginalized

groups by claiming that this perceived discrimination against White Caucasian people is in

anyway similar to the historic and continuing oppression experienced by marginalized groups.

Both statements illustrated above can be viewed as an attempt to regain power over the

term racism for the dominant sector of society. Critiques of affirmative action are attempts to

regain a perceived loss of power for the dominant members of society. The legislation is designed to 'even' the historical playing field as marginalized groups have historically been subject to intense oppression from the dominant society. When a White Caucasian member of society claims 'reverse racism' it can logically be viewed as an attempt to regain some of that lost advantage that has historically benefitted White Caucasian people. The term 'reverse racism' can be viewed ideologically as it concerns the power of one race over another. The social effects of these chosen comments could be such that people will believe the sentiments expressed by the authors and buy into the argument that in modern history it is White Caucasian people who are being oppressed. Such views ignore the historical implications of racism in their attempts to reclaim power over the subordinate group.

Next, I will discuss examples of overtly racist comments found on online mainstream national news media comment boards. I will warn the reader at this point that these comments are graphic in nature and contain direct examples of statements that are legally considered hate speech.

Theme Four: Overt Racism

In order to analyze overtly racist comments it will not be necessary to use any of the analytical framework used in the previous themes, or indeed, discuss the theoretical nature of these racist comments as current hate speech laws provide one with the criteria to assess these comments. Overtly racist comments have already been deemed by society to be unacceptable, so I will refer back to the Canadian hate speech laws to critique overtly racist comments. As a reminder, according to the Department of Justice Canada (2012) the hate speech laws in Canada are defined as:

Everyone who, by communicating statements in any public place, incites hatred against any identifiable group where such incitement is likely to lead to a breach of the peace is guilty of

(a) an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years; or

(b) an offence punishable on summary conviction.

Willful promotion of hatred

(2) Everyone who, by communicating statements, other than in private conversation, willfully promotes hatred against any identifiable group is guilty of

(a) an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years; or

(b) an offence punishable on summary conviction (Department of Justice Canada, 2012).

I found four comments that were overtly racist on a popular online sports media site. The following is a list of overtly racist comments taken from the 662 comments left in response to a story. Many of these comments were posted repetitively using a commenting method called spamming, where the user continuously posts the same comment for increased effect:

holocaust for the dirty filthy criminal minded ****!

***** = DANGEROUS POOR CRIMINALS ALL IVE IN GOVERNMENT HOUSING ****AND ***** VERY UGLY **** AND STINK BAD TOO

IF EVERY **** PERSON ON EARTH DROPPED DEAD THE WORLD WOULD INSTANTLY BE A FAR BETTER PLACE TO LIVE.

***** animals like ██ belong on the ***** or in a cage.

North American society rejected these sentiments many years ago during the civil rights movement. In a legal sense, these comments are very easy to evaluate. All of these comments are taken from a public forum which satisfies the first criteria of hate speech and each comment willfully promotes violence or incites hatred. I will note here that I struggled ethically with the decision to reproduce these comments in this research even with the blocking out of racial slurs, and do so only to inform on how vile the nature of some commentary can become on online mainstream national news media comment boards. Furthermore, as I stated earlier, these comments are taken from a very popular online sports media site. However, my ethical dilemma is such that in order to inform of the existence of such comments on online mainstream national news media comment boards I have to reproduce something from these comments giving them further audience. However, I think it can be assumed that the reader will find these comments as volatile as this author. The important thing to note for teachers is that our students do not have to venture to the far corners of the internet to encounter this material as these were posted in plain view on a website accessible by many people around the world. We cannot simply block the comments of those who stand alone as racists by applying hate speech laws because the law still does not recognize these comments as acts.[23]

In the preceding chapter I have gone through and analyzed four themes found on online mainstream national news media comment boards contained on mainstream media websites, including accusations of playing a 'race card', portraying the 'other' as criminal, accusations of 'reverse racism' and overtly racist comments. In order to conduct my analysis, I determined that a reader must critically analyze these texts for reasoned argument. Each statement analyzed was missing evidence to support the hateful claims of the author, thus, I found that users of this news

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[23] I came to this point after discussion with M. Forrest on April 21, 2012.

media do often post racist content. Next, I will discuss the implications of this study for

education.

Chapter Nine: Discussion and Implications for Education

The use of rhetoric is not without virtue as Lynn (2010) points out while discussing the founding of the Athens democratic system when he states that "we can see its [rhetoric] potential to do good, its inspiring relationship to justice, free speech, and democratic institutions" (3). Without proper persuasive rhetoric our democracy may not be where it is today and it is not my intention to attack persuasive rhetoric. Rather, my concern is with the evaluation of a persuasive argument that can be considered virtuous versus arguments that contain hate speech. As I argued earlier using Butler (1997), all speech acts have the capacity to cause harm to a marginalized group.

The overtly racist comments I encountered while conducting my research were significantly easier to analyze than the surrounding comments which could also be considered perlocutionary in nature according to Austin (1962). There is a dark side to rhetoric as Lynn (2010) points out by stating that "what if your clever neighbor can argue more convincingly that your olive tree belongs to him?" (4). This paper is more concerned with the 'dark' type of rhetoric, the kind that persuades readers to accept what can be deemed a less than virtuous point of view. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the Canadian Media Consortium (2011) provides a statistic that is of the utmost interest to Canadian educators, the fact that fifty three percent of those aged 18-34 choose the internet as their preferred media for news consumption. This is a statistic that one can only envision growing over the coming years as modern trends would indicate that we will continue to see a shrinking of the more traditional printed media to make way for an increase in online news media publications.

As I have demonstrated with this paper, users are already using these media to express their opinions anonymously about national and local media stories. Perhaps the national news

media is attempting to keep up with innovations in social media by allowing these comments to be posted anonymously. If the expectation is that online media and the ability to comment on stories anonymously will continue to grow, then education must adopt a new role, moving beyond traditional media studies courses and into a new realm that prepares students for their future intimate interactions with the national news media.

Critical race theory provides educators with a theoretical framework to begin preparing students to engage with the new media of media communication. As a reminder, Su (2007) states that critical race theory makes the following points:

1. Racism is commonplace, and colourblind conception of equality will only address the most egregious forms of individual-based racism, rather than structural inequalities between social groups.

2. "White-over-color ascendency serves important purposes" via the notion of *interest convergence*. Most anti-racist reforms are expected to only happen incrementally, and only when they serve the interests of white elites.

3. Race is socially constructed and historically embedded.

4. In contemporary American society, *the unique voice of color* serves important purposes. CRT contends that the social realities of people of color nevertheless give them experiences, voices and viewpoints that are likely to be different from the mainstream, dominant narratives. It therefore becomes imperative that people of color advance their own *counter-narratives,* often via story-telling modes that fall outside the usual confines of academic discourse (533).[24]

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[24] For the purposes of this study, the focus is on Canadian society. I have shown that the idea of the unique voice of colour is equally applicable in Canadian society.

If racism is as commonplace as critical race theory claims, then how do educators prepare students to engage issues of race and racism critically? Rodesiler (2010) suggests that "By learning to examine the rhetoric of preexisting media messages, however, young readers and viewers can glean information that might otherwise go unnoticed and subsequently develop as autonomous critical consumers of media"(164-165). Rodesiler (2010) is advocating for critical media literacy in public school curriculum, something which this research has indicated is necessary. Torres and Mercado (2006) believe that the answers for critical media literacy lie in finding greater alternatives to the mainstream national news media. Rather than being directed to alternative media sources, which students will be able to find themselves if they are interested, this research argues that it is important for students to be able to analyze the content found in the national news media and in online comment boards found on national news media websites.

Orlowski (2006) believes that critical media literacy has never been harder to teach as we are living in an age of what he terms "spin." Orlowski (2006) states that "the issues the media focus on, the language used to frame the debates, and what is omitted from these debates are also socially constructed" (177). Orlowski (2006) goes on to claim that the foundations of critical media literacy began with cultural studies and challenges the norms and accepted views of society. However, so much research is conducted on the national news media's bias and little has been done to analyze peoples' reactions to the media as posted on online mainstream national news media comment boards. In that spirit, I have provided teachers with an analytical framework to critique not just the media but also people's reactions to the media. Judging by some of the content that can be found within these comment boards, I think that the media should certainly look into closely moderating the kind of comments posted in order to act ethically. It is worthwhile to note that while media bias is still a very pressing and urgent matter, at the very

least stories in the national media should be edited for proper argument. Judging by some of the

content that can be found within these comment boards, I think that the media should certainly

look into closely moderating the kind of comments posted in order to act ethically.

The critical discourse analysis which I conducted above can easily be adopted into the

current Nova Scotia curriculum. According to the Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English

Language Arts Curriculum (1996), by the end of grade 9, students will be able to "demonstrate

that print and media texts are constructed for particular purposes and particular audiences" and

"critically evaluate the information they access" (34). The critical discourse analysis outlined

above satisfies these outcomes in two ways. By studying the persuasive mode of a statement,

students can determine the difference between a reasonable argument and persuasive rhetoric.

Provided with the correct philosophical background, students can identify the intent of comments

left on online mainstream national news media comment boards by determining how evidential

proof works in constructing a reasonable argument. This new skill developed by the student

allows for the achievement of the first student outcome mentioned in the Nova Scotia curriculum

guide for English and language arts, because students will be able to critique how these texts are

delivered for the purpose of persuasion.

The critical nature of a critical discourse analysis of comments posted on online

mainstream national news media comment boards will reinforce the value of critical analysis of

accessed information. By questioning the persuasive mode of the statements encountered on

online media comment boards, students will be able to critically evaluate this specific content.

Using this method of analysis can foster a critical view for students when they encounter the new

forms of online media. However, English and language arts are not the only area of current Nova

Scotia curriculum where this activity is applicable.

In current Nova Scotia education guides, social studies consist of numerous topics including African Canadian studies, Atlantic Canada in the global community, community economic development, history, Gaelic studies, geography, and Mi'kmaq studies. According to the Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum (1999), the framework for curriculum in social studies includes the following perceptual strands: "citizenship; power and governance; culture and diversity; interdependence; individuals, society and economic designs; people, place and environment; time continuity and change; communication; inquiry; participation; attitudes; value; perspectives" (14). My research complements a number of these perceptual strands, including citizenship, power and governance, and culture and diversity. According to the Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum (1999) the learning outcomes for the aforementioned perceptual strands are as follows:

> Students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and the origins, functions, and sources of power, authority, and governance.

> Students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of culture, diversity, and world view, recognizing the similarities and differences reflected in various personal, cultural, racial, and ethnic perspectives (15).

As I mentioned previously, one of the major concerns of critical discourse analysis is the reproduction of power in society, which can help students to further study the sources of current systemic racism in the history of oppression. Furthermore, a critical discourse analysis could also foster meaningful discussion about culture and diversity, as the critical discourse analysis conducted above includes the study of racism in online comment boards. This discussion about

hate speech and systemic racism lends itself to a deeper classroom discussion about the value of

understanding culture and diversity in addition to the promotion of positive democratic

citizenship. According to Mosley (2010) "Children and youth in educational settings bring a

myriad of literacy practices that are liberating to the educational setting, the types of powerful

literacies that are used to recognize, name, interpret, and change societal norms and practices"

(452). This multicultural approach to education provides educators an opportunity to take

education beyond its current approach of transmitting knowledge from teacher to student and

rather, focus on bringing out what children already know and challenging their current views

through philosophy. Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) pioneered this method by advocating

for philosophy in the classroom. Believing we underestimate the ability of children to reason,

Lipman et al (1980) wrote "But just as children must be taught the difference between using

language well and using it badly (e.g., ungrammatically), so they must be taught the difference

between reasoning soundly and reasoning sloppily" (3-4). As I have shown with my analysis

above, a wealth of unreasonable and potentially harmful statements can be found on online

mainstream national news media comment boards and if students are engaging with online

media, then they are increasingly likely to encounter these phenomena. Conducting a critical

discourse analysis of comments left on online mainstream national news media comment boards

offers teachers a chance to teach students to read these comments critically.

Furthermore, according to the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (2008), in order

to graduate from public school students must understand the responsibilities of citizenship and be

"able to assess social, cultural, economic and environmental interdependence in a local and

global context" (8). One of the goals of Atlantic Canadian public education is the creation of

global citizens. Users who post hateful comments anonymously on online mainstream national

news media comment boards avoid their responsibility as citizens of the world by masking their identity. The critical discourse analysis outlined above can foster an understanding of civic responsibility by making students aware of anonymous racism and its hateful nature. Deverell (1996) provides a very useful reminder for every citizen when she advises each of us to "know thyself, even the effect you produce" (68). Students need to understand the effects of anonymous racism in order to ensure that they will not contribute to these phenomena.

Future research into this topic should be conducted in order to determine how students are currently engaging with the comment sections of online news media. Though this is beyond the scope of this research, future study of student interaction with online mainstream national news media comment boards could further enlighten educators to the importance of teaching students to analyze these comments critically.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This research has sought to determine whether comments posted on online mainstream national news media comment boards contain content that can be considered racist or hateful. As such, it became clear that I would have to determine the difference between acceptable speech and hate speech. I began this process by examining critical race theory and its critique of liberalism. It is worthwhile to note that I am not suggesting that liberalism has failed in its quest for equality, but rather, has been misused to assume that society has achieved the goal of equality. I found a relationship between critical race theory's quest for equality and the civic responsibilities taught to students through citizenship education. It became clear that teachers have a responsibility to guide students onto the path of positive citizenship and it seems that critical literacy is a valuable teaching tool to achieve this goal, especially when preparing students to be critical of online media. However, it also became apparent that in order to perform this analysis of comments posted on online mainstream national news media comment boards I would first have to determine the nature of the discourse that occurs on these sites.

Upon reviewing the literature about democratic discourse it became clear that comments posted on online mainstream national news media comment boards were missing key ingredients that ought to be present in reasoned discourse. Within the theme of anonymity, I found that online media users were able to hide their identities and thus, shirk responsibility for their statements. The discourse that occurs on these sites seemed to be stagnant, as they were missing a key factor in defense of the written word according to Plato's interpretation of Socrates, namely, the presence of the author to defend his/her statements (Phaedrus, 1989). Users of these sites are able to post comments and walk away from the computer screen, leaving it open to

debate as to whether those comments are defensible. In closing of this section, I determined that rigorous democratic discourse would continue to be found in person-to-person debate.

I analyzed the pros and cons of the anonymity of internet discourse. While it can be stated that internet anonymity has allowed for oppressed citizens of the nations of the world to speak out against their oppressors, anonymity has also allowed racists to spread their message of hate. I set out to analyze previous literature on online racism. I found that themes of genetic inferiority, criminality of the other and 'reverse racism' were all themes found on websites that spread messages of hate. I also analyzed the hate speech laws of Canada, only to find that the legal system has yet to provide a clear line between acceptable speech and hate speech. I analyzed two verdicts, and though both seemed to be cases of hate speech, only one case was successfully prosecuted. Next, it seemed pertinent to examine the nature of bias in the media. In order to demonstrate the existence of a media bias I used the case of Hurricane Katrina as an example. I found that the media was often culpable for the continuation of stereotyping of marginalized communities.

In order to properly analyze comments posted on online mainstream national news media comment boards, I introduced critical discourse analysis as my methodology. Critical discourse analysis and critical race theory share in the pursuit of social justice. In critical discourse analysis I found a critical lens through which to view the comments posted online. Critical discourse analysis was found to analyze the means by which language reinforces power structures in society. However, I still needed to determine what could classify as hate speech. I used Butler (1997) to show that a speech act is not only reliant on the speaker but also determined by the reception of the audience to whom the speech is directed. Using Austin (1962), I showed that speech is an act that has consequences, though the law does not view speech as an act.

I found four themes in online commentary, accusations of playing a 'race card',
criminalization of the 'other', accusations of 'reverse racism' and overt racism. The analysis of
these comments was dependent on the distinction between a reasoned argument and an opinion
that is designed to persuade. As such, I determined that it was necessary to analyze commentary
by considering rhetorical modes. I found that all comments were using a persuasive mode and
lacked the evidence to back up comments which were often hateful. The implications for this
study for education are advocacy for critical literacy in the classroom. I have provided teachers
with an analysis that suggests ways of meeting the theoretical framework of both the English and
language arts and social studies curriculum in Nova Scotia. Since students are already showing a
preference for online media, critical discourse analysis becomes more important to properly
prepare students to analyze the content found on online news media sites. I also noted that
through critical discourse analysis students can be made aware of their responsibilities as
democratic citizens and the harm that anonymous racism causes. Only by teaching students to be
critical of media can we ensure that they become responsible citizens willing to critique the
world around them. As Freire (2009) states:

> For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.
> Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless,
> impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world,
> and with each other (72).

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