THE MERITS OF A FOOL: CONTENDING WITH RACE AND RACISM THROUGH SKETCH COMEDY FROM THE 1960S TO THE 2000S

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ABSTRACT

Studying social movements is one way to understand social change. The historical timing of their appearance and the ways they are similar and different from previous social movements is an excellent method for capturing localized salient concerns and the course of societal responses to systems of inequality over time. Another social arena, often undervalued in traditional sociological studies on systems of inequality and their related societal responses, also exists built for the emergence of social confrontations with the status quo. Whether as a psychological release valve, as a method to strengthen positions of dominance, or as a social position to voice criticisms too hot for everyday interaction, the mutability of comedy serves to encourage the emergence of relegated perspectives. There is a great deal of truth to saying a joke is never just a joke. Of course not without consequences, the significance of comedic instances is tempered by its temporal nature and the inherent ambiguity of interpretation. Incidentally, both of these qualities are also what gives comedy freedom from operating social norms of decorum and also allows for opportunities to confront these social norms. It should not be surprising that totalitarian regimes outlaw any practice of comedy, while the most democratic of nations, still riddled with racism, can claim a rich history of comedic challenges to race ideology. It is most likely for this reason that recurring characters like Luther, President Obama's "anger translator" on *Key and Peele* even exist. Luther is the President's alter ego who performs and personifies all of the emotions the first non-white president must presumably feel, but is prevented from expressing, especially in relation to

the trappings of contemporary racial logic. The main point here is to take a closer look at these seemingly strange bedfellows – comedy and race – and to consider these humorous proclamations against race and racism as types of momentary, but constant, social protest.

Using popular commentary as a measure of controversy that is widely known, the most controversial sketch comedy shows in each decade from the 1960s to the 2000s were selected and analyzed. Additionally, all other sketch comedy shows that aired at the same time for each show were analyzed, leading to a more complex depiction of racial politics in the U.S. over five decades. Examining race through comedy lends itself to seeing racial dynamics from the edge and through the lens of social critics who possess wider degrees of discursive and performative acceptability. The story they tell confirms their critical social importance and their unique encounter with prevailing issues of race and racism. This study examines contemporary "fools" and how they resist, challenge, and transform race ideology. In order to capture the landscape of each show and to identify variations across the show, basic demographic characteristics will be collected through pre-established categorical determinations. As the primary level of comparison, sketch comedy shows consistently linked to controversy or labeled as "controversial" by news and popular media sources were selected due to their notoriety and subsequent exposure and familiarity in wider societal and cultural consciousness. Following the logic that controversy may indicate moments of transgressive agitation, the most controversial shows in each decade were selected: *The Smothers Brothers Show* (1960s), *The Richard*

Pryor Show (1970s), *In Living Color* (1990s), and *Chappelle's Show* (2000s) and *Da Ali G Show* (2000s). The first year of syndication for each show was analyzed in addition to all other sketch comedy shows that aired contemporaneously, for context and comparison. A total of 1,120 sketches from the 1960s to the 2000s were analyzed using both quantitative (crosstabulation) and qualitative content analysis. The qualitative analysis relied on several aspects: techniques of narrative (characterization and dominant story lines), discourse (characteristics of language and word use and connections to narrative), semiotic (deep structures, latent meanings, and signifying process via signs, codes, and binary oppositions) and interpretive analysis.

Additionally, results from a case study of audience reception on one show, *Chappelle's Show* using focus groups are also a part of this analysis and discussion that aid in discovering emergent themes. These narrative accounts represent both individual and group narrative negotiation of the process of identification or resistance to the characters meant to represent the participants. In order to determine how racial identity shapes a viewer's interpretation and reception of comedic popular culture messages on race, there were three types of focus groups: one all white, another all black, and the last a mixture of white and black participants. A total of four focus groups (2 white, 1 mixed, and 1 black) were completed from 2007-2008 at the Institute for Survey Research with IRB approval at Temple University.

The following research questions ultimately framed the application of quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both, methodological approaches to data collection, analysis, and interpretation:

- To what extent does comedy serve as a successful cultural forum to challenge race ideology?
- What discursive and representational techniques do these transgressive moments and examples employ?
- What are the predominant narrative themes of transgressive comedic moments and how do they change over time?
- How do transgressive discourses and representations of race interface with other spheres of inequality like gender, class, and sexuality?

I argue that: 1) racial discourses and representations in sketch comedy have increased since the 1960s, with the exception of the 1990s; 2) generally, transgressive discourses and representations contain low levels of racial performance except in cases where racial performance is enacted with a clear satirical purpose and is integral to the overall plot of sketch; 3) examples of transgressive racial discourses and representations, when evaluated using an intersectional lens, reveal fault lines between blacks and other non-whites (notably, Asians and Hispanics), and the reinforcement of hegemonic discourses and representations of gender and sexuality; 4) the clearest and consistent comedic environment for transgression contains both discursive and semiotic elements,

including a wide array of racial perspectives, voices, stories, and renewed representations of subordinated groups; and 5) focus group data demonstrates that both black and white participants organize their interpretations around a negotiation of their laughter – whites work to legitimize their laughter, by justifying their racist opinions or distancing themselves from other, "more" racist whites and blacks express the anxiety that accompanies their laughter, concerned about whether the mockery of racist stereotypy will confirm racist beliefs for whites and other non-black groups and while they laugh, their laughter is often accompanied by the pain and frustration experienced in their daily lives contending with racist ideology.

DEDICATION

To second chances and all those that prepared the way.

Especially,

my mother, father, and oppa,

a lineage of wild women,

and my Thursday night family.

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODS OF INQUIRY

Introduction

Presently, racial politics in the U.S. is as tense as it has been in the past. While the manifestation of race ideology has enjoyed a brand of resolution through widely shared examples of affirmative action at work and an era of colorblindness, the recent "discovery" of state and police brutality against young black males calls all of those myths to a dead stop. The movement "BlackLivesMatter" is finally a societal response refusing to treat race and racism as a problem solved through the abolition of slavery and completed by The Civil Rights Movement. This concrete and virtual public outcry draws its firm line, almost obviously, because of the stakes involved – life or death. Contending with this kind of biological racism that so often goes unnoticed or unchallenged in this public manner, and to be successful in gaining popularity, makes this particular response incredibly interesting and rare. What some communities might have known for years, most individuals in the U.S. now know, making the significance of race and racism a difficult concept to argue against, or claim is resolved. Even in the post-racial responses to the movement, like "AllLivesMatter", this kind of wide social galvanization around racial issues, one that does not seem to be losing momentum, causes feelings of hope that social change regarding racism may receive more lasting attention. Studying social movements is one way to understand social change. The historical timing of their appearance and the ways they are similar and different from previous social movements

is an excellent method for capturing localized salient concerns and the course of societal responses to systems of inequality over time. Another social arena, often undervalued in traditional sociological studies on systems of inequality and their related societal responses, also exists built for the emergence of social confrontations with the status quo. Whether as a psychological release valve, as a method to strengthen positions of dominance, or as a social position to voice criticisms too hot for everyday interaction, the mutability of comedy serves to encourage the emergence of relegated perspectives. There is a great deal of truth to saying a joke is never just a joke. Of course not without consequences, the significance of comedic instances is tempered by its temporal nature and the inherent ambiguity of interpretation. Incidentally, both of these qualities are also what gives comedy freedom from operating social norms of decorum and also allows for opportunities to confront these social norms. It should not be surprising that totalitarian regimes outlaw any practice of comedy, while the most democratic of nations, still riddled with racism, can claim a rich history of comedic challenges to race ideology. It is most likely for this reason that recurring characters like Luther, President Obama's "anger translator" on *Key and Peele* even exist. Luther is the President's alter ego who performs and personifies all of the emotions the first non-white president must presumably feel, but is prevented from expressing, especially in relation to the trappings of contemporary racial logic. The main point here is to take a closer look at these seemingly strange bedfellows – comedy and race – and to consider these humorous proclamations against race and racism as types of momentary, but constant, social protest.

Furthermore, since comedy is a cultural structure that can tolerate multiple and conflicting perspectives, the study of resisting race ideology through comedy also reveals recurring dominant and ambivalent stances toward race. Using popular commentary as a measure of controversy that is widely known, the most controversial sketch comedy shows in each decade from the 1960s to the 2000s were selected and analyzed. Additionally, all other sketch comedy shows that aired at the same time for each show were analyzed, leading to a more complex depiction of racial politics in the U.S. over five decades. Examining race through comedy lends itself to seeing racial dynamics from the edge and through the lens of social critics who possess wider degrees of discursive and performative acceptability. The story they tell confirms their critical social importance and their unique encounter with prevailing issues of race and racism. This study examines contemporary "fools" and how they resist, challenge, and transform race ideology. Within the cultural realm that is most resistant to social change – the television industry – (DiMaggio 1977)[1], these fools stick to the strategy of irony at all costs. At times, these

[1] The book publishing industry is the most receptive to change, given the correct economic, bureaucratic, and creative conditions and the music industry less so. While the music industry is the most "turbulent and competitive" formulation of popular culture production, it is the television industry, whose modus operandi is most primed for hegemonic manifestation and control, that is the most resistant to change. DiMaggio (1977) draws from the model developed by Peterson and Berger (1971) in their study on American popular music which demonstrates the effects of market structure on the organization of the creative process (brokerage systems). Varying market structures and brokerage systems ultimately affect the degree of innovation and diversity of popular culture products to the "cultural economy" at large. DiMaggio identified three ideal types of cultural-production systems: mass culture, class culture, and pluralistic culture. Mass production as an economic mode of production is not necessarily inimical to creativity, since large corporations may engage in high levels of innovation to avoid competition in the marketplace; incidentally, the highest levels of innovation and diversity do typically

fools produced examples of transgressive discourses and representations of race in sketch comedy from the 1960s to the 2000s. They do indeed endeavor to hold multiple positions horizontally, however awkwardly rendered, inappropriate, or disastrous the potential outcomes. They are fulfilling their social role to be the "fly in the paint" and generate closer examination of particularly pressing social concerns and preoccupations. As a result, they create a type of mirror we resist facing while remaining drawn to it, and while a rare occurrence empirically, still bear a closer sociological examination.

As a cultural form, comedy relies on implicitly identifying normative social boundaries and quite explicitly crossing them. Comedy is to meant incite and inspire mischief, surprise, disbelief, and of course, laughter. Comedic discourses are funny because they go where normal discourses will not. Comedic discourses embrace the forbidden spaces created by socially dictated boundaries of acceptable behavior, governing social norms, attitudes, and belief systems. Humor also acts in various psychological capacities, for solidarity and relief for those in subordinated societal positions, to create and reinforce social distance within hierarchical positions, and as avenues of resistance through mockery and criticism. Humorous discourses are an important indicator of current social preoccupations and a display of methods to reinforce the status quo and efforts to cope with, resist, or challenge them. By its very objective,

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emerge from individuals or smaller organizations. Five aspects determine the type of cultural-production system: 1) market structure (oligopolistic to high levels of competition); 2) form of organization (the relationship of brokers, like editors, to managers and creators); and degrees 3) of market segmentation; 4) of innovation; and 5) of diversity (Ibid 1977:443).

humorous projections and emissions create entertainment by challenging and reversing the world as we know it. Crossing, poking, mocking, and even at times defiling these boundary lines are just what comedians do. An examination of salient social boundaries – those particular arenas of social concern, anxiety, and contention, along with the conventional – is naturally accomplished because comedy exists to challenge those demarcations.

Examining societal norms and representations within this context means gaining insight into the normal, the pathways by which the reversal occurs, and the potential for alternate discourses. The comedic context, on the one hand, allows for the emergence of silenced, repressed, and secondary discourses because of the ambiguity involved in interpretation. As opposed to serious discourses, comedic discourses rely on linguistic techniques, like irony and metaphor, increasing the likelihood of multiple interpretations. In other words, the rules and boundaries of interpretation (meaning) are different from serious discourse, since these borders are messy and permeable. The emergence, therefore, of typically marginalized discourses is bolstered by these fluctuating points of entry, creating an ideal context for the production of alternate knowledge. Comedy has also, on the contrary, demonstrated the effectiveness of reinforcing exaggerated and limiting representations of vulnerable groups without equal access to countering or challenging these characterizations. To laugh at targeted groups enforces already existing stereotypes and continuously reaffirms superiority. In between these two extremes are the variegated and multiple combinations associated with entering a cultural forum that is, by design, mutable and rebellious. The promise of intended interpretation by the public is a

precarious venture for any form of cultural production and is particularly pertinent to comedic discourses. Recent controversies associated with *Chappelle's Show*, like the inaccurate characterization of the show as a show predominately about race to the problematic reproduction of racial mimicry by mainly young white males serve as appropriate examples of the winding ways that challenges to race ideology become consumed and assimilated by all players involved – the artist/creator, the viewer/audience, and the media/public. Questions and commentary on Chappelle's culpability in the reproduction of racial stereotypes and racial slurs abounded in popular media. His unexpected departure from the show after the second season led to rumors of a mental breakdown. While he made several appearances on well-respected, popular culture platforms, like *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Inside the Actor's Studio*, and discussed his departure and experiences with nuance and depth, the most transgressive messages in his show were often eclipsed by speculation on his "crazy" behavior. *Chappelle's Show* and other controversial shows that also contained transgressive discourses and representations of race, like *The Richard Pryor Show*, demonstrated the sometimes confounding, frustrating, and highly publicized lived experience of attempts to criticize and highlight social areas of concern, like race ideology. Challenging race ideology using comedic formats makes a great deal of sense given the permissive boundaries of entry and higher levels of the potential for multiple perspectives to emerge at the same time. But, utilizing a cultural format that encourages multiple interpretations that are often formed dialectically, and in opposition, also means that these attempts are also susceptible to unintended and impossible to predict outcomes. This often mercurial

nature of comedy is poignantly rendered through the history of minstrelsy in the United States, just as it currently unfolds on popular sketch comedy shows and HBO comedy specials.

The examination of race and racialization through the comedy show is undeniably negotiated due to its televisual method of reception. Unlike the activity of reading a joke, comedy shows project at a minimum two levels of discourse – the visual and the verbal. Therefore, I am not only interested in the types of discourses produced about race but also how television as a mediating force shapes these humorous discussions of race. Comedy shows are also distinctive from other forms of comedic discourse, such as stand up, due to the intricacies of ownership, management, production, writing, directing, and casting that are involved in any televisual project and experience. The influence of television as a mediating force is therefore significant in the ways that particular discourses and representations are contextualized, but this study will not address research questions regarding the particular intricacies of the television industry as a primary focus. But the influences of production, the publicized politics of television production from censorship battles to the significance of ownership, that is, who is behind the curtain, is in the purview of this examination.

By examining comedy shows, several things are illuminated: 1) normative depictions of race; 2) timely points of contention, including struggles over identity politics and positioning of various racial groups; 3) the discourse of race in a comedic context via recurring themes and most commonly used narrative devices; and 4) the emergence of counterhegemonic challenges to race and how these discourses and

representations differ. Observation of comedy shows over time captures the shifting boundaries around race and is one way to document the particular ways racialization occurs over time.

This study also explores the subversive[2] potential of comedy through three major concepts – carnivalization, heteroglossia, and parody and irony – as advanced by the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Since the focus of the paper is on the particular transgressive potential of racial humor, Bakhtin's concepts will be evaluated vis-à-vis race and racialization theories noting the shifts, adaptations, and changes that occur when race and representation are considered. How does the transgressive potential of the carnivalesque contend with the conflicting thesis that representations of race are an integral part of racial projects that are consistently controlling and negative? Similarly, how do racial representations and identities become liberated, even if for a brief comedic moment, through the use of discursive techniques rooted in multivocality?

Guiding this analysis and discussion are a few framing theoretical positions: redemptive hegemony, a contingent process of identity formation, and racial formation theory.

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[2] The term "subversive" is used here instead of "transgressive" to place some emphasis on how seriously Bakhtin regarded the reversals of the social order in the carnivalesque. While temporal, events associated with the carnivalesque quite literally changed the social world. Generally, the term "transgressive" is used in the bulk of the analysis herein, noting a focus on counterhegemonic discourses and representations whether or not they are successful in establishing a widespread and commonly accepted change in the social order (subversion).

1) Redemptive Hegemony: In her application of Catherine Bell's synthesis of Kenneth Burridge's understanding of redemptive process and Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony, Anne Kane (2011) proffers the notion of "redemptive hegemony" in her analysis of the construction of an oppositional Irish national identity in 19th century Ireland. Adding to Bell's demonstration of how subordinated groups appropriate elements from the dominant structure to wrestle with and contend with power, Kane charts the historical development of a counterhegemonic formation that endeavors to reclaim power from the dominant structure (see also, Judith Butler [1990] 2008 and Rana Emerson 1995).

2) Contingent Identity Formation: Most notably, the late Stuart Hall (1989) and bell hooks (1992) have conveyed the contingent nature of identity construction, especially vis-à-vis mass media narratives and representations. Identity is not an "already accomplished fact." Indeed, Paul DiMaggio (1997) recounts our cognitive potential to engage in what psychologists term "deliberative cognition". This is the process by which we learn to successfully adopt new messages or truths through the synthesis of new information that conflicts with our automatic cognitive processes. Change, while laborious, is certainly possible and a part of how we understand our selves, others, and the social world via cultural messages and objects.

3) Racial Formation Theory: According to racial formation theory, race is anything but static or predetermined, but rather an unstable, shifting, and adaptable construct, becoming defined through the existence of various racial projects (Omi and Winant

1994). As a construct, race adapts to fuel and strengthen the prevalent goals of each racial project, affecting how race is understood, represented and applied, affecting both micro and macro levels of social life. Arguably, certain strategies of racial projects are slow to die resulting in familiar and recurring images and representations, but as Omi and Winant propose, enduring racializations take on new garments through rearticulation, and new racial articulations arise according to their relevance to racial projects.

A longer and deeper consideration of theoretical positions and lessons will be explored in the next chapter, "Theory and Historical Context" with particular emphases on theories of humor, the intersection of race with popular cultural discourses and images (jointly explored in the section "The Makings of Race"), and television and production. Psychoanalytic framing of issues on racism and nationalism will also be discussed along with a historical review showcasing studies and insights on racial formation through multiple, interconnected planes of social difference. In particular, early racial formation in the U.S. vis-à-vis performative methods recounts the complicated relationship of hatred and desire, loathing and envy, and cultural appropriation and fantasy inextricably linked to race and racism, humor, class, gender, and sexuality. Lastly, the unique discursive and sacred place humor (carnivalesque) occupies for social beings as proposed and realized by literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981; [1968] 1984; and 1986), is explored and discussed.

Methods of Inquiry

This study will employ a constructivist grounded theory approach that continues the important departures from positivistic methodological traditions undertaken in grounded theory. Simultaneous collection and analysis of data, privileging of analytic strategies rather than pre-formulated data collection methods, and the view that rather than representative of reality, data are narrative constructions of experience form the overall methodological approach (Charmaz 2003). Charmaz draws a distinction between "objectivist" and "constructivist" approaches to grounded theory noting some positivistic vestiges present in objectivist traditions that continue to entertain the possibility of a realist ontology and objectivity of researcher. Generally, Charmaz's critique locates the primacy of interpretive, situated, and flexible methodological applications. With an emphasis on meaning, foregoing an insistence on an external reality, a constructivist grounded theory "recognizes the interactive nature of both data collection and analysis, resolves recent criticisms of the method, and reconciles positivist assumptions and postmodernist critiques" (Ibid:270). Therefore, this study is further guided by a cultural sociological approach to analysis, one that views culture as an integral part of social analysis and comprehension, which is both a part of governing social structures and an autonomous structure "made up of interrelated parts and processes arranged in a logical pattern of classification" (Kane 1991:54). This approach relies on the following assumptions: "1) reasons are causes, 2) cultural theory is nominalist, and 3) the sociohistorical world is metaphysically pluralist" and applies interpretative strategies consonant with them (Reed 2012:37). This methodological and epistemological approach

to cultural analysis takes as its starting point the location of meaning through interpretation but sheds a constraining split between positivist causality and interpretive subjectivity. Typically in positivist examinations of social action, reasons are logical, not causal. Reed (2012) uses an example from the work of Donald Davidson that challenges the artificial split between actions that result from the mind ("He turned left because he wanted to get to Boulder, Colorado") and actions that result from the body ("He moved his hand off the stove because the stove was hot") (38). This approach is also nominalist, emphasizing a deep consideration of shared cultural meanings, with historical specificity that does not attempt to produce grand theories of culture, cultural practices, or social action. Yet the absence of all-encompassing theories or findings do not impede insights into shared systems of meaning through various cultural negotiations. Lastly, a cultural sociological approach relies on a pluralistic understanding of reality in which meaning is in a constant revolving door of reconstitution. In this view, the "world comes to its interpreters in socio-historical patches of structured meaning" (Ibid:40). Perhaps the most extreme difference between qualitative approaches, which already emphasize the exploration of patterned, subjective meanings, and the cultural sociological approach, is the emphasis on culture and shared systems of meaning, that possess as much "concrete autonomy" as other traditional sociological social structures like family, education, class, and race (Kane 1991).

Through a balanced consideration of the negotiation of two ever-shifting social planes – race and comedy – the aim is to discover a possible logic to their intersection

and how race is understood through comedy in the post-Civil Rights era. Analyzing narrative trends and the similarities between transgressive and hegemonic comedic discourses and representations of race over time provides a simultaneously unifying and critical contribution to theories of race and racism, identity, and popular culture and production. Nevertheless, coding "objective" variables, like numbers of characters in a sketch and their gender and racial identities, or the presence of racial discourse, can be a powerful quantifiable expression of already operating relationships. In other words, as portrayals of the current state of hegemonic articulation of racialization through comedy.

In order to capture the landscape of each show and to identify variations across the show, basic demographic characteristics will be collected through pre-established categorical determinations. As the primary level of comparison, sketch comedy shows consistently linked to controversy or labeled as "controversial" by news and popular media sources were selected due to their notoriety and subsequent exposure and familiarity in wider societal and cultural consciousness. Following the logic that controversy may indicate moments of transgressive agitation, the most controversial shows in each decade were selected: *The Smothers Brothers Show* (1960s), *The Richard Pryor Show* (1970s), *In Living Color* (1990s), and *Chappelle's Show* (2000s) and *Da Ali G Show* (2000s). The first year of syndication for each show was analyzed in addition to all other sketch comedy shows that aired contemporaneously, for context and comparison. A total of 1,120 sketches from the 1960s to the 2000s were analyzed. The comparative analysis, therefore, will address change in discourses and representations

over time and controversial versus non-controversial. Appendix A is a complete list of comparisons in the dataset and Appendix B contains introductions to each show.

Clearly, data regarding the racial identifications present in the shows is necessary. Data regarding gender will also be collected following the important observations by Rana Emerson (1995) and John Fiske (1996) of the intricate ways gender and race each inform the construction of the other. An intersectional approach will be privileged, recognizing the impact of multiple levels of social identities on discourses and representations in their delivery, articulation, and meaning (Collins 2000). The race and gender of characters will be coded, along with a separate category measuring the racial proportions (dominated by one racial group or balanced), displays of drag or racial performance (playing a race that is not a character's race), the format of the comedic segment (for instance, stand up, or sketch), and the network. While this study's focus is on the negotiation of race through humor, all episodes will be coded, with a category noting instances that directly relate to race. Generally, this category is meant to reflect the proportion of a show's focus on race. Since racial discourse, in and of itself, is never purely discursive, the operationalization of the variable "racial discourse" presented distinct methodological challenges. Language is both figurative and literal, and so possesses an equal reliance on shared symbols and systems of meaning that are more immediately open to interpretation. After initial rounds of coding and noting difficulties with deciding whether a sketch actually contained racial discourse, or semiotic elements, or a combination of both, the new variable "implicit racial discourse" was created.

"Implicit racial discourse" is meant to specifically address the semiotic (and representational to a large extent) aspects of racial discourse. While I was able to recode the entire sample discussed herein for racial discourse (direct, discursive statements that contain words like "race", "racism", "black", "white", and obvious semiotic invocations, like the "Ku Klux Klan") and present statistically significant trends, the "implicit racial discourse" variable has only been applied after the reconsideration of the operationalization of the variable "racial discourse". So, trends discussed relate primarily to *discursive* relationships to comedic formulations and racial ideology and incidentally, are quite conservative surveys of the relationship between comedy and race. Consequently, the statistical analysis and interpretation, by and large, project a cautious portrayal of these relationships. Perhaps not surprisingly, the qualitative analysis, more involved with the consideration of semiotic meanings and representations and discourse, confirmed much of the statistical overview. While at times, the qualitative discussion contributed depth and complexity to the theoretical relationships between comedy and race in the U.S. with the added benefit of statistical significance and generalizability.

The categories "racial slurs", "homophobic slurs", "drag", "racial performance", and "sexuality performance" are categories that became significant during several pre-test analyses over a number of episodes and across shows. The increase of the use of racial slurs is especially prevalent in instances of comedy about blackness by black comedians and it would be interesting to see how this relates to the content of the discourses and representations. While I did not observe as many instances of homophobic slurs, I include this category mainly out of a continuance of an intersectional approach; the categories

"drag" and "sexuality performance" also follow this logic. "Racial performance" will measure the amount this visual humorous tactic is employed and how often it occurs within and between shows. Demographic information about writers and production will also be noted, as well as any significant changes mid-season. These are season codes and will be coded once for the duration of the show. These codes, capturing the gender and race of all involved "behind the scenes" are included due to their relative importance to an analysis of television as indicated by the literature. These are ancillary categories meant to give an overall sense of the racial and gender make-up of the shows and to catch any significant differences between shows and over time. Furthermore, they contextualize the types of racial discourses and representations that are produced in a show, serving as an additional tool for a situated analysis.

Given the above noted differences between humorous and serious discourses, literary strategies peculiar to humor were another site of potential categorical importance. Through careful study of the discourse of humor, Arthur Asa Berger (1995) identified forty-five rhetorical techniques, which fall into four broader categories: 1) humor involving identity; 2) humor involving logic; 3) humor involving language; and 4) humor involving sight or action, or visual humor. I adopt Wendy Griswold's (1987) suggestion to carefully study and apply categories, terminology, and assumptions used by experts in the cultural field of inquiry at hand. Two categories exist to capture a sense of the dominant type of humor and the overall strategies used to achieve a humorous effect. The categories in "type of humor" were compiled from an initial survey of the common categories used to distinguish types of sketch comedy shows from one another. This

variable measures the overall comedic feel and style of the show. I also coded episodes according to the four types of humor techniques used in each sketch. This category collects important information regarding the mechanics of the racial discourse, specifically in terms of what common strategies are used. Pairing this technical information with narrative, semantic, and semiotic data from the qualitative analysis creates a thorough and nuanced picture of how racial meaning is spoken and seen. For an exhaustive list of a priori coding categories and their definitions, see Appendix C.

Overall, the qualitative analysis of the sketch comedy shows were analyzed using techniques of narrative (characterization and dominant story lines), discourse (characteristics of language and word use and connections to narrative), semiotic (deep structures, latent meanings, and signifying process via signs, codes, and binary oppositions) and interpretive analysis (Neuendorf 2002). In addition to analyses based on language and narrative structure, emphasis will also be placed on representational aspects, noting visual elements of costume, character performance (such as mannerisms and gestures), setting, camera perspective, lighting, and sound. Television employs unique formulas that shape a particular "reality" through recognizable cultural codes, with heightened reliance on stereotypes (Fiske 1992). These representational manipulations work through various levels of encoding, each symbolically compatible with ideological codes that produce a "congruent and coherent set of meanings that constitute the common sense of a society" (Ibid:6). Likewise, these representational codes could serve as departures from common sense meanings and realities.

Out of the sample of sketches analyzed, only 4.5% (n=50) advanced successfully counterhegemonic discourses and representations of race. Simon Weaver's (2011) delineation of successful reverse discourse strategies, which work to resolve ambiguity in interpretation and achieve a firmer closure of meaning, was one of the major guiding principles by which I deemed sketches transgressive or not. In addition, sketches that created alternate representations (typically addressing the semiotic) that departed from racist ideology, whether or not they employed discursive strategies were also included. Lastly, sketches that rearticulated hegemonic narratives, situations, and readings concerning racial ideology were also an important plane of consideration. Transgressive sketches were grouped into three thematic groups: reinterpretation, commentary, and everyday situations. 35.1% of transgressive sketches used reinterpretation, 59.4% commentary, and 5.5% everyday situations. Generally, sketches in the reinterpretation category used hegemonic (familiar) situations, memories, narratives, and identities as a method of entrée into the critique, thereby questioning, destabilizing, and at the most effective times subverting racist logic. These sketches frequently contended with intense symbols of racism such as chattel slavery and the Ku Klux Klan, or adopted some classic American symbol, such as the cowboy, reinterpreting them in a fashion that destabilizes our commonsense understanding of the shape and form of the symbols. The most common thematic category of all transgressive sketches was the manipulation of the humorous format to deliver clear and direct anti-racist statements and commentary that challenge and attack the interpretation of popular symbols, realities, and characterizations. These sketches take advantage of the permeability of humorous

discourses to tolerate secondary discourses that in serious contexts would be immediately rebuffed. This is to say that examples of such clear objections to and criticisms of racial hierarchy and ideology have an easier time at gaining entrance, seemingly unnoticed. What would immediately be considered a charged and aggressive verbal attack, through the comedic infrastructure, becomes palpable without losing rhetorical integrity. Also used in transgressive sketches are the parody of everyday situations, or "real life" to discuss and contend with race and racism. While not as necessarily powerful as sketches that utilize reinterpretation and commentary, since these techniques necessitate a form of re-writing history and clear verbal assaults on racist logic and hegemony, these sketches typically enact a "behind the scenes" tactic that allows the viewer to see it how it "really is".

Results from a case study of audience reception on one show, *Chappelle's Show*, using focus groups are also a part of this analysis and discussion that aid in discovering emergent themes. These narrative accounts represent both individual and group narrative negotiation of the process of identification or resistance to the characters meant to represent the participants. In order to determine how racial identity shapes a viewer's interpretation and reception of comedic popular culture messages on race, there were three types of focus groups: one all white, another all black, and the last a mixture of white and black participants. A total of four focus groups (2 white, 1 mixed, and 1 black) were completed from 2007-2008 at the Institute for Survey Research with IRB approval at Temple University.

Participants were recruited from Temple University[3] undergraduate students using ad postings in *The Temple Times* and *The Temple News*, in-class solicitation, and word-of-mouth. Participants were screened according to their age (had to be under the age of 25), with a minimum enrollment for at least two consecutive years.

A short questionnaire regarding TV watching habits (most frequently watched and average hours of TV watched per week) and some demographic information was administered prior to beginning the focus group. Focus group questions sparked discussion regarding participants' interpretation of the comedy routine, for example: What was Dave Chappelle's message? Was there a message beyond comedic relief? What are the stereotypes of blacks and whites and do they differ in magnitude, type, or presentation? Did anyone feel offense towards his statements or conclusions? The names of all participants, excepting the facilitator (my initials JK in excerpts from transcripts used below and I administered all focus groups), have been changed for purposes of confidentiality. The full interview protocol used during all focus groups can also be located in Appendix C.

The following research questions ultimately framed the application of quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both, methodological approaches to data collection, analysis, and interpretation:

[3] Total main campus enrollment in 2005 = 20,313. Racial breakdown was: whites 58.5%, African Americans 16.1%, Asian-Americans 3.4%, Hispanic 3.4%, and other 12.9%.

- To what extent does comedy serve as a successful cultural forum to challenge race ideology?
- What discursive and representational techniques do these transgressive moments/examples employ?
- What are the predominant narrative themes of transgressive comedic moments and how do they change over time?
- How do transgressive discourses and representations of race interface with other spheres of inequality like gender, class, and sexuality?

I argue that: 1) racial discourses and representations in sketch comedy have increased since the 1960s, with the exception of the 1990s; 2) generally, transgressive discourses and representations contain low levels of racial performance except in cases where racial performance is enacted with a clear satirical purpose and is integral to the overall plot of sketch; 3) examples of transgressive racial discourses and representations, when evaluated using an intersectional lens, reveal fault lines between blacks and other non-whites (notably, Asians and Hispanics), and the reinforcement of hegemonic discourses and representations of gender and sexuality; 4) the clearest and consistent comedic environment for transgression contains both discursive and semiotic elements, including a wide array of racial perspectives, voices, stories, and renewed representations of subordinated groups; and 5) focus group data demonstrates that both black and white participants organize their interpretations around a negotiation of their laughter – whites work to legitimize their laughter, by justifying their racist opinions or distancing

themselves from other, “more” racist whites and blacks express the anxiety that accompanies their laughter, concerned about whether the mockery of racist stereotypy will confirm racist beliefs for whites and other non-black groups and while they laugh, their laughter is often accompanied by the pain and frustration experienced in their daily lives contending with racist ideology.

CHAPTER 2
THEORY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the previous chapter, three framing theoretical positions, redemptive hegemony, a contingent process of identity formation, and racial formation theory, were briefly considered. Redemptive hegemony is especially important to the study herein because it situates power, the contention with power, within simultaneous spheres of structuration and social control while taking seriously the role of agency in social change. While a contingent process of identity formation may result in fears of the production of meaningless and endless chains of social identities, in fact, our adaptability to social stimuli and our ability to learn and change, is one of greatest strengths. What scholars like Stuart Hall, bell hooks, and Anne Kane show us is that the importance of phenomenological experiences of reality are consonant with larger, if at times conflicting, structures of social control – like race and nation. Black females experience and possess the "oppositional gaze" to controlling images of black femininity and sexuality. Due to their intersecting experiences of gender, race, sexuality, and class, the existence of this "oppositional gaze" is nearly a natural outcome to living through multiple spheres of social difference. Additionally, oppositional identity construction is not merely a function of responses to the rapid and saturated modern experience of media, but is a social and historical aspect common to collective responses to the implementation and maintenance of structures of power. As Anne Kane expertly demonstrated in her study on the construction of Irish national identity through land wars and freedom from British domination in the late 19th century, contention with what was historically speaking, an

impossible foe, is no passing area of social inquiry. Both Hall and hooks most notably demonstrated the continued construction of images and histories of racism, colonization, and the other. Arguing forcefully against any notions of post-racial harmony in this regard also confirms the conceptualization of race as a highly adaptable social construct. Omi and Winant plainly note the durability of the race construct, one that will most likely be with us in present and future social realities. The historical specificity of the nature of racial formation largely determines its particular shape of iteration, since racial formation is ultimately linked to operating racial projects. Racial projects with particular objectives, cultural contexts, and areas of commonsense applicability.

Given the peculiar nature of comedy, a consideration of prevailing theories of humor will also be discussed in the current chapter primarily for an exegesis of how past scholarship has understood humor and comedy. It is of note that nearly every intellectual discipline has produced a major work on humor and comedy – Freud, Aristotle, Hegel, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Mary Douglas come to mind. Therefore, this theoretical reflection on theories and studies of humor bears an importance in addition to its obvious connection to the study at hand. It is true that the studies and conclusions are diverse, often solitarily considered, and sometimes divergent from one another. Comedy has been convincingly argued as a weapon for the weak and as a weapon for the strong. The minstrel show, America's first truly American cultural production, largely utilized as a way to justify a history of slavery and terror, served the strong. In this case, the mutability of comedy functioned to create a socially sanctioned and popular form of

everyday entertainment often serving to ease the psychological wages of occupying a social position of privilege and simultaneous class inferiority. Indeed, the compulsion to perform black masculinity, a way to recover and solidify a certainty regarding early American identity formation, masculinity, and class consciousness, became a way for working class white men to strengthen positions of racial hierarchy. But just as structures of power adapt to changing legalities, efforts to reclaim a semblance of power are typically bolstered by this same mutability of comedy. Ambiguity in interpretation becomes a source of liberation not available in societally shared spaces of legitimacy. The boundaries of acceptable behavior and topics of discussion are just not as strict in comedy, or humorous formats in general, as they are in other social spheres. Consequently, a closer examination of the unique discursive nature of humor, as understood by Mikhail Bakhtin, is also in order. Admittedly, Bakhtin's analysis celebrates the liberatory nature of folk rituals embracing the carnivalesque. Laughter to Bakhtin possessed a universal and ontological role in social life, something he identified as an unfortunately fast disappearing element to social structure. Concerned ultimately with those "subaltern" voices competing for attention in literary classics from Dostovesky or the parodic voices common to comedy as in Rabelais's *Pantagruel*, Bakhtin's scholarly works provide a rigorously considered portrait of oppositional voices (heteroglossia), clues to analyzing parodic texts, and a revitalizing case for socially determined comedies of critique.

In her widely cited contribution to feminist theory, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler [1990] 2008 opined in the chapter "Subversive Bodily Acts," that "[p]arody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony" (189). This theoretical investigation is undertaken by Brian Gogan (2009) in the chapter, "Laughing Whiteness: Pixies, Parody, and Perspectives" found in a collection of essays entirely devoted to analyzing one of the most controversial contemporary comedians, Dave Chappelle. Published in 2009, it is telling that so much immediate attention, in both scholarly and popular analysis and media, resulted from Chappelle's career in the early 2000s. Gogan tackles the controversial nature of Chappelle's narration of the steps leading to his exit from *Chappelle's Show*, in particular Chappelle's recounting of his discomfort with the laughter of a white spectator who "laughed particularly loud and long" (72). While developing material for what would have been the third season of the show[4], the laughter of this white crew member made Chappelle uncomfortable. This characterization, widely consumed in a 2005 *Time* magazine article, ultimately raised questions about the culpability of Chappelle in reproducing racial stereotypes and an insidious counter-characterization that served to excuse the many spectators, often white, but not always, who almost joyfully participated in a reproduction reflecting the durability of racial hierarchy. It is within this area that Gogan's analysis is less successful

[4] These sketches were eventually run on Comedy Central with Charlie Murphy and Donnell Rawlings co-hosting and released on DVD as "The Lost Episodes".

when considering cultural controversies surrounding race and racism. An analysis focusing on the contours of laughter from whites in response to comedy on race and racism is not in question, nor the conceptual application of Butler's challenge to pin down differences between parodic responses to hegemony. Gogan succeeds in making laughing a serious matter and presents an illuminating consideration of laughter as "extra-linguistic" and argues that in "sketches that target race, laughter escapes the confines of language and thereby creates an extra-linguistic space in which individuals can confront authority by maneuvering in, around, and/or about racial markings" (85). He makes important contributions to legitimating parodic responses to hegemony, continuing Bakhtin's conceptualization of parody as an effective discursive response to dominating authoritative logic and discourses. Yet the assumption that the "extra-linguistic" nature of laughter escapes the trappings of race ideology, whereby treating things as uniform like "language" or "laughter" unduly sidesteps race ideology, even as it discusses race through comedy. In other words, critical race theory does not regard any aspect of social life or social analysis as occurring outside of racialization processes. In a very real way, the laughter of whites and the laughter of non-whites can never be the same, can never be contemplated without the acknowledgment of positions in the racial hierarchy, and can never be understood with any semblance of post-racialism. This is not to say that this seemingly insurmountable divide cannot be lessened, or that transformation of race ideology is impossible. Perhaps it is for this reason that Gogan asserts that "laughter's subversive potential depends neither on context nor reception [and that] language cannot be read or written as parodic, subversive alleged, racist-sounding, too-hard, or anything

else for that matter, because laughter does not signify in any shared fashion" (77). The deafening absence of critical race perspectives, such as Stuart Hall and bell hooks, produces an incomplete deliberation of the complicated relationship between contemporary comedy and racial politics. In order to provide an analysis of race and comedy grounded in critical race perspectives, a thorough evaluation of prevailing theoretical and empirical findings on the intersections between race, gender, sexuality, and class with identity formation processes, audience reception, and popular culture is undertaken in the section "The Makings of Race".

The view that each construct – race, gender, sexuality, and class – situated in early American national identity formation, is incapable of regarding any one construct as distinct from the other is discussed through Joane Nagel's (2003) and Eric Lott's ([1993] 2013) sociological and historical studies. Taking black feminist critiques into cross-sectional areas of these social constructs, Nagel successfully applies a wide-ranging conceptualization of the constructions of sexed, raced, and gendered indigenous populations of the Americas, Asia, and Africa. This approach further bolsters what is traditionally held as practice in black feminist approaches and results in discussing the colonization of America and the structures necessary to support it – racial hierarchy and apartheid, class and gender inequality, and the eroticization of non-white bodies and sexualities – beyond the black-white binary. The examples she uses to demonstrate the enduring legacies of the gendered, sexualized, and raced symbols of native masculinity, like the "noble savage", serve to continue the comprehension of racial formations in the

past and how they remain active today. Eric Lott also, in his impressive examination of minstrelsy in 19th century America, substantiates how historical cultural performances of black masculinity not only played a vital role in the construction of working class white masculinity, but also how they continue to manifest and transform into contemporary times. On this point particularly, Lott's argument that the practice of minstrelsy by largely urban, Northern, middle class and immigrant white men as a way to escape the pressures of what Weber called the "iron cage", continues through iterations like American bohemianism, Jack Kerouac and the Beats, and other modern ways to "black up"[5] (51).

There is no contention over the intimate intersections and shared reliance of social constructs like race, gender, class, sexuality, and cultural performance, especially when creating a theoretical frame to examine contemporary comedy in the United States. And yet for all of their undeniable contributions to scholarship on race, culture, gender, and sexuality, the issue of the gaze of those consumed remains relatively unaddressed. In this regard, the extension of hooks's "oppositional gaze" to the gaze of the dominant in

[5] For upwardly mobile middle class white males, performing and consuming "blackness" indicates "the degree to which blackface stars inaugurated an American tradition of class abdication through gendered cross-racial immersion which persists, in historically differentiated ways, to our own day" (52). For white immigrant males, the performance of blackface minstrelsy was couched in different class and racial terms. While middle class white males endeavored to become "blacker", white working class immigrant men often feared a close association with "blackness", while possessing legitimate claims of class oppression and so, to an extent, an affinity with other black laborers. Lott argues that blackface minstrelsy was "founded on this antimony, reinstituting with ridicule the gap between black and white working class even as it reveled in their (sometimes liberatory) identification" (74).

situations of attempts to reverse the usual order of racial mockery is necessary. Do white viewers experience a similar opposition to discourses and representations that attempt to "other" them? Additionally, how do those most primed to resist hegemonic discourses and representations of race voice their opposition? How do these discourses and representations "talk" to one another – over time and across categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality?

In a recent book on race and comedy, Simon Weaver (2011) certifies the rhetorical power of racist joking on the internet. Certainly not a joking matter, these jokes possess "rhetorical legitimacy" and tirelessly work to reinforce positions of power. Many of Weaver's approaches to analyzing racist humor and his development of tools to understand "reverse strategies" employed by counterhegemonic comedic examples as used by comics like Richard Pryor and Chris Rock, inform the analysis herein. They proved to be consistently effective ways to interpret the discourses unique to comedy about race, racism, and efforts to resist race ideology. One of the overarching theoretical contributions in his nascent analysis of the two extremes of comedic discourse on race resulted from the discourses that could be found in the middle. These ambivalent discourses of race (Weaver used *Da Ali G Show* and the Danish Prophet Muhammad cartoons as prime examples) led him to conclude that a general increase in ambivalence, typifying what Zygmut Bauman considered the "liquid" state of modernity, about race may lead to a new formation of racism, what Weaver called "liquid racism". Bauman regarded the state of modernity as an ever-growing state of the creation of ambivalence,

via a semantic need to categorize, ultimately leading to further fragmentation and the creation of a semantic void. Following this and noting the increased amount of semantic slippage inherent in comedy, Weaver defines liquid racism as a novel formation of contemporary racism, distinct from cultural, biological, or even colorblind racism. According to him, it is

> fluid, difficult to collect or identify because it may escape or dissolve before it can be contained, and is explicitly encouraged or given coverage in mass media forms. This is a racism that requires reflexivity in the reader when questions are asked on its meaning, social impact or implications for the self. It is also a racism that emerges in an age of multiple constructions of national belonging, and in this case, Britishness. (153)

Exacerbated by comedy's interpretive ambiguity, Weaver argues that liquid racism in humor "dilutes" any chance for interpretive clarity, putting even more at risk the potential for critique from the reader. In other words, only counterhegemonic comedic discourses on race and racism have any guarantee of rhetorical legitimacy. But, even Weaver admits that a racist interpretation of material from Chris Rock, an example of successfully "resolving" ambivalence, is not only possible, but likely if we take the magnitude of the race construct seriously.

Rather than shun ambivalence, or to find a way to guarantee interpretation, I propose the fusion of what Gogan termed the "extra-linguistic" nature of laughter, or in this application, broadly thought of as the psychoanalytic position of Slavoj Zizek and the moves toward a neoclassical social theory, grounded in self-irony, as proposed by Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley (2003). An ironic, historical approach to social analysis, as long

as it is rooted in self-irony, encourages reflexivity and discourages the elevation of any one standpoint or logic. Therefore, the ironic researcher, as a practice, distances herself from macro and micro level hegemonic meanings and truths and becomes empathetic to the position of the "other", be it in terms of ability, gender, race, sexuality, class, physical and mental health, or nation. As a result, ironic views and analyses of the social world have a central role to accept all positions and to challenge hegemonic meaning, however they may manifest. In a sense, it keeps us honest. While an ironic approach is "relationist" accepting the "possibility of multiple truths, with each truth still distinguishable from untruth," a cynical approach is relativist (Ibid:9). To treat a surge in ambivalence, or a surge in the related search for meaning in this theoretical framing is not relativist, or the cynical portrait that Bauman and Weaver predict. If we look to the social role of the comedian as a site of the production of ambivalence, or taken in another way, the production of alternate positions, then the increase in ambivalence does not necessarily mean a determinate loss of meaning. Rather than holding the ambiguity in comedic forms responsible for commonsense interpretations laced with clear vestiges of de jure, cultural, and colorblind racism, perhaps the location of accountability should rest on those interpretations and how our social formation supports them. Who is culpable in the mirror's reflection? Of course, comedy, like any site of cultural production does not merely serve as a reflection of society, since the relationship between production and reproduction is convoluted and complex, but be that as it may, one function of comedy is to reflect prevailing norms. Likewise, Weaver's and Bauman's conceptualization of the status of modernity in relation to semantic production misses the "extra-linguistic"

components of social existence that Lacanian psychoanalytic developments, explored via Slavoj Zizek, address. In this regard, Gogan's contribution to note the subtle differences within comedy is of note. Comedy is both linguistic and psychological. Although his application of what was most likely Freudian theories of comedy as a method for psychological tension relief through corporeality was accurate, the intersection between the psychoanalytic and race ideology was missing. Because Zizek's analysis of nationalism rests on an application of Lacanian psychoanalytic frames, he proffers convincing reasons for the puzzling persistence of racism and the popularization of PC culture at the same time. Ultimately, the construction of the other has always been "supra-discursive," since the project of nationalism, no matter how weak discursively, survives and resists social change because it draws from deeper psychological drives and needs. The recognition of this importance to any social formation is echoed by Eric Lott and David Roediger ([1991] 2003) in their meticulously argued portrayals of the development early American national consciousness. Therefore, the inclusion of Zizek's understanding of modern racism, specifically for his unique contribution to critical race theory, is necessary and appropriate, given the inherently psychological nature of comedy.

Finally, a look at theories of television and production will be explored since the focus of this analysis rests primarily on comedy about race on television. With its amazing ability to reach unprecedented amounts of audiences across national boundaries, television is quite properly regarded as one of the most influential cultural innovations of

the 20th century. Like any subculture, the television industry and methods of practice hold a shared consciousness and like any social structure hold an enormous amount of power. That is, there is often little control over cultural products after it leaves the artist's or writer's hands. On the contrary, television has also proved to be a shared, albeit virtual, social space for the emergence of previously subordinated identities. The question of whether television, like comedy, liberates us from or propagates hegemony is addressed through major voices on the topic. The particular place of counterhegemonic comedic attempts in this particular context calls for a close understanding of the production practices of this particular entertainment industry.

Theories of Humor

Comedy is both personal and shared. Its relevance and ubiquity elevates it to the universal – every civilization and society possesses some form of comedy, the type of play that can encompass the prevalent fads, fascinations, and preoccupations. Joyce Hertzler (1970), decidedly states that one can *know* a society by and through its comedy alone. While explored and theorized through a plethora of scholarly perspectives, no one discipline can claim an exhaustive or substantive command of knowing humor. Those echoing the importance of comedy, though perhaps not with Hertzler's inalienable certainty, cross intellectual disciplines: 1) socio-scientific; 2) psychological; 3) philosophical; and the 4) literary. Sociologist Murray Davis (1993) aptly summarized the major contributions across disciplines of the significance of humor to knowing the human

condition into three categories: as *tension relief* represented by the works of Freud and Herbert Spencer; as a method to maintain social distance and affirm positions of *superiority* as theorized by Aristotle and Hobbes; and as social critic, reversing and mocking contemporary morals, behaviors, hypocrisies, and obsessions via incongruity theories of Kant and Schopenhauer. This understanding of humor rests on the notion that laughter occurs when there is a disjuncture between the expected and what is received. Comic visions of society thus present us with, for example, alternate, discontinuous, and contrary realities. If the basis of our laughter rests on encountering the absurd, the normative also surfaces as the basis of contrast (Berger 1995). We have therefore a window into knowing the dominant, prevailing cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors and how we categorize and name the opposite to them. We can then address questions like: What are the normative representations of race and other social identities like gender, sexuality, and class? In comedy, what social positions, actors, and behaviors are routinely used to represent the absurd, abnormal, and contradictory to achieve comic incongruity? In what ways have these representations shifted over time? Jesters, comedians, and humorists are socially prescribed to say the forbidden, exploring both sides of the status quo via regressive or progressive observations (Hertzler 1970). The social commentary aspect of humor highlights the tensions surrounding representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality, offering insight into salient aspects of these characterizations and how they are discussed and contended with.

The ridicule of one particular social group, what Christie Davies (1990) calls the "stupid" group, for enforcing social distance is an underlying factor in ethnic humor.

Through this social distance, all abnormal and undesirable characteristics are transferred onto this outsider group, reaffirming the normality of everyone else. This helps not only to clearly define social boundaries between groups, but also affords psychological comfort through feelings of superiority and dominance. Ethnic and racist humor have expected damaging effects, influencing the self-worth of ridiculed groups while reinforcing racist ideologies (Weaver 2010). Davies contends that the need for this release stems from the constant anxiety that living in a complex, industrialized nation creates, a way out of the "iron cage" of modern pressures and responsibilities. Humor is a way to transgress normative prescriptions, to express taboo ideas and feelings. It is the type of discourse where the degrees of decorum and acceptability are wider than in other forms of human communication and interaction.

Sociological analyses of humor address a multi-faceted array of the relationship between various forms of humor and comedy, such as jokes and stand-up, by demonstrating the serious effects of comical forms on social identities and identity formation, and the maintenance of hegemonic structures of inequality. Akin to other cultural forms, such as music and literature, preferences for types of comedy demonstrate processes of boundary construction as they function similarly as reliable ledgers of prevailing processes related to social identities, like class and race (Bryson 1996; Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie 1997; and Friedman and Kuipers 2013). Both Bryson and Friedman and Kuipers point out that while cultural consumption choices do not necessarily indicate cultural capital a la Bourdieu, an examination of tastes within popular cultural forms (music and comedy respectively) reveals the constructions of

symbolic boundaries that work to define cultural superiority and inferiority, both along predominately class lines. On the production of culture side, talent scouts, serving as "hidden tastemakers", redouble the processes of cultural distinction by mediating the availability of types of comical styles and content (Friedman 2014). Despite the perception of comical forms as ephemeral and insignificant, racist jokes possess rhetorical legitimacy, with interpretative strategies similar to rhetorical mechanisms like metaphor and metonym, that occupy a significant space in maintaining and justifying racist logic (Weaver 2010). Contemporary joking culture is also a malleable social space in which the permission to participate in racist joking is allowed and encouraged, bolstered by the myth of a post-racial society (Perez 2013). Perez, like Friedman (2014) investigates the specific location of another form of hidden tastemakers, improvisational comedy instructors, and the varying ways they direct white and non-white students to engage in racist joking.

While Weaver (2011) convincingly demonstrates the rhetorical power of racist jokes, he also includes a preliminary examination of "reverse discourse" strategies of black and Asian comics in the UK and the US. Noting the popularity of examining the potential of humor as a form of resistance, the particular conceptualization of resistance humor as a vehicle for the resolution of ambivalence receives special attention via the work of Bryant (2006) who discusses the use of humor as resistance by Czech nationals under Nazi occupation (Weaver 2011). The most successful contemporary examples of race-based resistance comedy ensure a similar form of the resolution of ambiguity in

interpretation (Ibid). H. Alexander Welcome (2010) conveys the strategic ways black female comedian Moms Mabley (also discussed herein) capitalized on the temporality of the comic context to resist and redefine representations at the intersections of racism and sexism. Covering a wide range of national, historical, and political contexts, the effectiveness of humor in solidifying collective identities in social movements and social agitation convey the overarching significance of humor in social processes (Bos and t'Hart 2008).

The resolution of the debate over the fully dominating or liberatory aspect of humor is less the focus of the following analysis and discussion, since as is the case with most cultural objects and meanings, the answer is most likely humor does both. The social significance of humor is clearly evidenced by the wide range of the ways in which it functions to both digest and interpret other social structures, like class and race. And while Weaver's (2011) rhetorical analysis of racist jokes proffers a convincing case for the function of comedy in maintaining and continuing racial supremacy, an analysis of the cultural meanings of comedy over time, with an empirical focus on the transgressive potential of comedy, remains relatively unexplored. Both Murray Davis (1993) and Christie Davies (1990; 1998; 2010; and 2011) have contributed profound findings in this vein, manifesting the ways in which jokes both challenge, reflect, and interact with operating social structures. Davis, through a wide survey of jokes demonstrates the comic vision of society, one that acts primarily as social critic through the exploitation of incongruities present in the social world. The joke, as a popular oral history "play[s] with

the forbidden" and serves to briefly reveal the "fabric of the unmentionables" (Davies 2011:3). While Davies demonstrates that the joke qualifies as a Durkheimian "social fact", worthy of social investigation, generally, he does not focus his analytic attentions to an assessment of the transgressive potential of jokes, or comedy in general. He has though established the foundation for the explication of prevailing joke cycles across national and historical contexts, demonstrating a form of logic to a mode of communication and cultural production that is presumed to be illogical (Davies 2011). Finally, in a pioneering assessment of the connection between popular American humor and national identity, Constance Rourke ([1931] 2004) established the grounds for the linkages between the popular, the comical, and the relationship between cultural meanings and social structural consequences. Indeed, the mechanisms explored herein by which comedy serves to express social identities and the shifting shape of boundary construction are integral to understanding both the cultural functions of comedy in society and processes of identity formation. Comedy is a "social fact", as evidenced by Davies's extensive research on jokes, but comedy, as a cultural form, also possesses "concrete autonomy" that views culture as a "structural factor that must be accounted for in historical explanation" (Kane 1991:55). This analytic framework for the study of culture calls for a blend of Durkheimian and Weberian approaches to social analysis because "Durkheim is concerned with understanding sociologically the internal structure of culture – what symbol systems and ritual processes do in social life [and] Weber is concerned with connecting that internal structure to transcendental interests, which are rooted in historically specific political, economic, and normative conditions" (Ibid:67).

While the functions of humor are manifold, the significance of humor to structural processes (boundary making, identity formation, and structures of inequality) has been adequately evidenced. My study continues this view of humor as an important characteristic of cultural processes that, as noted by Kane, are not epiphenomenal, but possess both analytic (an independent structure of culture) and concrete (historical specificity) autonomy.

Unique Discursive Nature of Humor

A closer examination of the formation of dialogic texts as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin provides us with a useful conceptual framework for understanding why and how the following sketches used direct commentary within the comedic context to achieve rhetorical clarity. As a form of discourse though that resides in polyphony, the potential for humor to subvert and transgress normative prescriptions is a logical and expected alternate outcome. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept heteroglossia is primarily intended for the processes of interpretation, resistance, and reception of literary texts, highlighting the position of the subaltern. He argues that present in most literary texts is the conflict and at times resistance of various voices such as the author, narrator, and subjects. A single novel represents the positioning of many voices, often dialectically, which also permits the potential for emergence of previously silenced narratives. Because any narrative expression exists firmly placed within a hegemonic culture that privileges a dominant interpretation, intent and meaning become confused. As Bakhtin explains:

> 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. (276)

This is because the discourse of a character (objectified discourse) is, in and of itself, comprised of two speech centers and two speech unities of both the author and the character. On the one hand, the character's discourse is contingent upon the fixed location of the author's discourse, in which it is subordinated and incorporated into it as a part of a whole. In other words, it only exists through and by authorial understanding. On the other hand, the second component of authorial discourse is wholly directed toward the completion and solidification of its own meaning; all stylistic choices sustain its unified existence. This is true, of course, only if authorial discourse is not warped or thwarted by overarching systems of domination like race. Certainly Bakhtin is concerned with the subaltern and assessing the methods by which the emergence of subsumed perspectives and voices is most likely to happen. Furthermore, Bakhtin's fascination with and defense of reversals of the social order for creating equality and freedom through the carnivalesque are well documented (Bakhtin [1968] 1984). He explores the carnival in medieval times – sanctioned periods of time performed in the marketplace – and how the ruling powers at the time, the church and the state, were "obliged to make concessions, large or small, to satisfy the marketplace" (Bakhtin [1968] 1984:90). These "small scattered islands of time" restricted to official feast dates (like the feast of fools and the feast of the ass) became a temporal paradise of escape from the official, ordered, and

constraining world, when the "world was permitted to emerge from the official routine but exclusively under the camouflage of laughter" (Ibid). The official world is authoritative, limiting, violent, and restrictive and thus mired in fear and intimidation, while the laughter of the popular festivals in the marketplace liberates, transcends fear and according to Bakhtin: "Its idiom is never used by violence and authority" (Ibid). Thus, along with universalism and freedom, laughter's other major characteristic resides in its close association with a popular, albeit unofficial, truth of the unseen, the unimportant, and the common.

As an illustration distinguishing between dialogic and monologic discourse, Bakhtin proffers the example of competing perspectives present in scholarly articles, as voiced by different scholars, as an instance of a dialogic interrelationship existing within a single context. Individual semantic choices and instances of these relationships[6] such as words, sentences, or other characteristics of a single utterance are not dialogic, instead, it is the body of whole utterances entering into dialogue with opposing or affirming utterances. The presence of semantic authorities in conflict/agreement/affirmation is a requisite for dialogic texts; the presence of additional dialogue introduced into the author's context does not, on the other hand, disrupt the monologic context. Because they are dependent on another semantic source, they become objectified discourse, only understood within the author's context. Of primary concern is the individuality and independence of the discourse in relation to a competing perspective as they face a

[6] Bakhtin lists agreement/disagreement, affirmation/supplementation, and question/answer as examples.

common subject of choice. Once this condition is met, Bakhtin argues that a dialogic encounter is inevitable, whether they agree or disagree – they must contend with one another, "lie side by side like two objects," and share a common nexus (Bakhtin 1984:189).

The contention between meaning and interpretation when another person's words enter our own discourse produce double-voiced discourse, because it produces a fusion of sorts of original intentions and transformed conclusions once new material enters the field of play. Bakhtin (1984) puts forth the following description:

> Our practical everyday speech is full of other people's words: with some of them we completely merge our own voice, forgetting whose they are; others, which we take as authoritative, we use to reinforce our own words; still others; finally, we populate with our own aspirations, alien or hostile to them. (195)

While four types of "artistic-speech" are considered double-voiced and metalinguistic[7], parody, still using another's discourse, departs from these other forms with a forceful semantic intention that is oppositional to the original. This second voice not only resists the original discourse, but assumes a position inimical to it, on the offensive, so that meaning serves directly opposing agendas. As opposed to other forms that can tolerate multivocality, whether through synthesis or subordination, there can be no fusion of

[7] The four types are stylization, parody, *skaz*, and dialogue. *Skaz* is a written form of narrative in Russian literature that imitates a spontaneous oral account of a particular persona, using techniques like dialect, slang and unique idioms. The etymology of the word derives from *skazat*, meaning "to say" and literally means a "tale." It was most notably used by Nikolay Leskov, Aleksey Remizov, Mikhail Zoshchenko, and Yevgeny Zamyatin (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014).

voices in parody; they are alienated from one another and in contention. In parody, the magnitude, depth, and clarity of the other's voice is unassailable, while the author's motives must be more individualized and with precise content. The situation is similar in ironic discourse and other double-voiced discourses in which another person's words are used for purposes hostile to a singular interpretation. Instances of ironic discursive techniques, the repetition of another's words refashioned with new declarations of scorn, mockery, ridicule, apprehension, and incredulity, are ubiquitous in typical conversations (Ibid).

Consequently, Bakhtin's examination of parody and its timely companion, laughter, is particularly useful in identifying the emergence of subaltern voices and potential sites of resistance. Parody has the potential to function as the "corrective of reality" (Morson and Emerson 1990). The author purposefully distances herself from a traditionally authoritative style in the hope of generating new, otherwise silenced, and often subversive versions of reality. The author (or performer in this case) assumes the voice of an outsider, employs a different language wherein laughter is strategically powerful. Part of this process involves the reproduction of dominant ideas and stances for the purposes of reversal and mockery, as evidenced in the reverse discourse strategies of black comedians such as Richard Pryor (Weaver 2011). He attacks and destabilizes the savage/civilized dichotomy of racist discourses by reversing, not refuting, interpretation. Whites may be civilized, but also suffer from the binds of repression, while the purported savagery of blacks means a freer, vibrant experience of the world. The result is the destabilization of racist logic and a redefinition of reality.

While the liberatory potential of comic forms has been demonstrated by Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia and carnivalesque for subordinated groups, the particular consideration of race ideology and the technological advances of the mass dissemination of visual images and discourses remains unexplored. Both hooks and Hall consider the intricate relationship between race, identity, representation, and the structures and processes that govern these encounters. Popular media images are anything but "just entertainment," they are a crucial and pervasive point of convergence of avenues of domination, justification for racism, negotiation of racial identities – a place where we come to know race. In his article, "Race, Media, and Civil Society," Ronald N. Jacobs (1999) views the decline of black newspapers as a problem, not just for black audiences, but for the wider interests of maintaining a healthy pluralistic civil society. The theoretical integrity of the Habermasian public sphere – the conceptualization of modern society characterized by open public discussion in which citizens actively question, regulate, and challenge the state – quickly unravels, not only because of the subordination and delegitimization of black public spheres in U.S. history, but ultimately because civil society is fundamentally fractured and incomplete (Ibid). Without the acknowledgement and active integration of these multiple, alternate "counterpublics," "[t]he public narratives which circulate in the dominant public spheres tend to reserve the heroic character positions for the dominant groups in a society, creating public environments which favor those dominant groups at the expense of minorities (364). Comedic discourses are societally kept apart from public narratives, serious narratives, and in judging the longevity or disappearance of a true public sphere may be a cultural arena

rich with potential for preservation and social agitation sustained by its relentless critique, naked societal examination and reflection, and, at times, the successful realization of the carnivalesque.

The Makings of Race

Popular Culture

An enduring site of negotiation and resistance along with the oppressive and hateful is located in representations and discourses of race. The visual aspect of racialization – images of the colonized, the enslaved, the other – long outlived the institutional dismantling of racial apartheid. In *Black Looks* (1992), bell hooks underscores and demonstrates her central premise that there is a

> direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation and overall domination of all black people". (2)

These representations are limited, repetitive and consistently negative. Binary systems of domination subsist on the propagation of these oppressive images, leaving little reason for a reduction or challenge to them (Collins 2000). Their effects are widespread, seemingly indelible, and insidious, often making any form of mere visual enjoyment contingent on a pointed ignorance of racism by the spectator. Others reject forms of visual entertainment that contain negative representations while others delight in these familiar, albeit stereotypical and repressive, depictions that, according to hooks, bears

witness to the processes of racism and internalization. Central to each of these positions is the preponderance of pain when relating to racial representations, this intense emotional response demonstrating the power of visual representation and the significance of its relationship to racial identities (hooks 1992). While the existence and influence of these negative images are unquestioned, the logic and predominance of a hegemonic racial order based solely on binary oppositions is shifting (Weaver 2011). Furthermore, both hooks and Collins (2006) concede to the increasing ambivalence of racial representations in popular culture. hooks considers the significance of increasing images and discourses of race, racial difference, and whether such an increase represents a novel way to continue consumption of the other, or a challenge to systems of domination. hooks, Collins, and Weaver each acknowledge the presence of controlling racial representations and successful attempts to countervail them, along with the rise in images and discourses that do not clearly serve either agenda, although on this point, Weaver is more transparent about the surge of ambivalence. Considering the noted reliance on stereotypical, historically successful, and persistent representations and discourses throughout the medium of television, binary systems of domination do continue to subsist. Yet clear demarcations no longer apply, as the medium of television supports the circulation of an unprecedented volume of information, the bounds of an either/or frame of race and racial discourses and representations are expanded.

Visual mass media formats like television occupy a particular space of identification, one that is vulnerable, specifically for identities and representations subject to marginalization. Considering the cultural identity formation and its relationship to

Afro-Caribbean cinema, Stuart Hall (1989) establishes the role of representation in identity formation as active, partial, and ongoing. Identity is not an "already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" (68). In line with hooks' development of a resounding critique of oppressive and controlling images of blackness, Hall acknowledges the power of representation, not only as a static tool of domination but as a dynamic and at times dangerous plane of identification. The panoply of oppressive images and representations, while originating from white colonial imaginations should not be viewed as a wholly extrinsic force lest their influences be underestimated. Identities are the "…names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (70). Positioning vis-à-vis visual representations and discourses of race necessitates a momentary concretization of identity, in which meaning is established. Identity is the structuring element of an otherwise malleable, situational self, which arises out of and through dialogic acts (Perinbanayagam 2000). The anchoring linguistic traits of identity bring a level of constancy to a contingent self and provide continuity among people and situations, differ in their range and depth, and function as methods of categorical differentiation. This view of language and meaning as both momentary and endless derive from Derrida's understanding of language as a boundless field of signification, wielding a continuous deferral of meaning (Norris 2002). Derrida's departure from understanding language and meaning as fixed and stable, in Hall's application, gain

theoretical force through the application of identity formation. An identification, this act of establishing meaning, requires a break in the chain of supplemental interpretations, a "contingent and arbitrary stop" that is strategic, conscious. and relevant (Hall 1989:74). What and how the next stop is defined is always yet to determined, because "[m]eaning continues to unfold, so to speak, beyond the arbitrary closure which makes it, at any moment, possible" (Ibid). Hall's application of Derrida's notion of endless "play" of interpretations presents a convincing argument for not only the continual and contingent construction of identity, but also for the integral role that cinematic and other visual representations serve. After all, the effects of these visual representations would be nil if identity was stable, uniform, and fully formed.

Perinbanayagam (2000) adds to the theorization of the formation of self by simultaneously conceding the presence of Derridean interpretative play while noting the elements of a pragmatic and practiced self. Drawing from Sandra Rosenthal's integration of Margaret Mead's and Charles Sanders Peirce's ideas of a logical interpretant, an ultimate logical interpretant emerges wherein the "self is centered, shall I say, by making it into a concept, an ultimate logical interpretant, that summarizes and collates the 'play' of interpretations that have gone before, a concept that is bound by structures of habit" (36). Additionally, identity formations grounded in the use of ironic tropes, as is the case in humorous discourse, rely on a dialectical relationship between one voice, one position or personality with others in the service of contrast and displacement to challenge, criticize, and subvert (Perinbanayagam 2000). His application of Kenneth Burke's (1969) delineation of four master tropes – metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony – that

structure all rhetorical communication and facilitate the discovery and description of truth, provides a theory of knowing that are selected in defining the self. Each trope, carefully chosen, portrays a non-deterministic process of identity formation that is continuous and encompassing, emphasizing each semantic technique characteristic to it: metaphor for *perspective,* metonymy to *reduction,* synecdoche to *representation,* and irony to *dialectic.* In Burke's words: "there is no place for purely human boasts of grandeur, or for forgetting that men build their cultures by huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss" (Burke [1935] 1965:272, quoted in Perinbanayagam 2000). Burke's likening of irony to dialectic will be explored even further through Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981 and 1984) treatment of the parodic and ironic forms of discourse as double-voiced, in conflict and contention, and in defiance of any single interpretation. In Burke's words:

> Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a *development* which uses all the terms. Hence from the standpoint of this total term (this "perspective of perspectives") none of the participating subperspectives can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another. When the dialectic is properly formed, they are the number of characters needed to produce the total development. (Burke 1969:512, quoted in Perinbanayagam 2000)

The ironic identity then, argues Perinbanayagam, forms a self defined by the dialectical relationship of one position and one voice that confronts and contends with other voices and positionalities. The product of this process is an identity that exists as a displacement of other identities, questions them, and ultimately achieves substantive clarity and relevance through opposition and elimination. While the construction of ironic identities

occurs constantly, three areas – the carnival, the circus, and the medieval court – provide familiar examples of the fool, the clown, and the jester (Perinbanayagam 2000). Each then also fulfills particular roles within the social world: 1) Fools instigate disorder, parody, and misrule by bucking social conventions through reversals and irreverence characteristic of the carnivalesque; 2) Clowns employ the grotesque in their disheveled appearance and clumsy demeanor, but through the contrast to the order of the tight-rope walkers, a systematic definition and certainty of order is achieved; and 3) Jesters who also rely on visual consequences of their brightly colored and ostentatious costuming, serve a primarily discursive mandate to mock, a sort of "licensed impudence" (Welsford [1935] 1966:173, quoted in Perinbanayagam 2000). The gravity and importance of ironic identities due to their role of advancing and sustaining subversive positions secures their pertinence when comparing them to other more "serious" identities. As argued by Hall, visual representations and their accompanying discourses also comprise a crucial component of available significations where meaning is determined, interpreted, altered, reconfirmed, and challenged.

As discussed above, the magnitude and effectiveness of television's influence has been theorized from the all-powerful to an interpretation that privileges agency, interpretation, and resistance. Some important advancements of the various points of resistance depending on social location can be found in bell hooks (1992) and JoEllen Shively (1992), who address black female gaze and Native American reception respectively. hooks expands on DuBoisian double consciousness and Manthia Diawara's (1988) conceptualization of the black spectator as a site of resistance by examining the

specific location of black female spectators as potential sites of a particular type of resistance, what she called the "oppositional gaze". Black female spectators are in the unique position, when viewing films, to resist identification with both the characterization of victim and perpetrator, since construction of desire (often synonymous with passivity or the victim) strictly revolved around a glorification of white femininity. She draws from Stuart Hall's conceptualization of identity construction as within representation and not outside of it and thus making the visual more than a mirror reflecting who we are, but rather an opportunity to re-construct ourselves, making it an important site of identity construction and agency (hooks 1992). In some ways as a contrast, an empirical study regarding audience reception of Native Americans and whites to the popular Western movie *The Searchers* was undertaken by JoEllen Shively using same-race focus groups. While Diawara argues that the black spectator resists aligning themselves with the white hero, the majority of Native American (and white) respondents said they identified with the white hero John Wayne. For white viewers, the Western movie is at the focal point of their myth-making of an idealized past where their ancestors were justified in their acquisition of these lands, while Native American respondents valued the western for its depiction of the idealized Western lifestyle and the beautiful setting of the landscape typical in westerns (Shively 1992).

However divergent their views are on meaning-making, the reliance on conventional, hegemonic identities, discourses, and representations is largely agreed upon. Otherwise, television as a widely enjoyed cultural form would fall short of its purpose, its ability to entertain, that is, to make sense to, large sectors of the population.

Given this, racial meanings and representations are always positioned and constructed within and in opposition to the dominant middle-class patriarchal discourses of whiteness (Gray 1995). Televisual representations of blackness, for the most part, work to legitimate and propagate the hierarchies of privilege and power of not only race (whiteness), but of class (middle class), gender (patriarchal), and sexual (heterosexual) differences. Contending with racial hegemony is not only limited to the most extreme and painful legacies of colonization, the violence of the KKK, or a racist justice system, but is also rearticulated via issues of style, taste and the ownership of classic American symbols like the cowboy. As discussed in earlier, televisual representations of blackness exist to maintain and justify systems of racial hierarchies. They are consistently predictable, negative and controlling (hooks 1992; Gray 1995; and Collins 2000). In the early 1950s, shows like *Amos 'n' Andy, Beulah, The Jack Benny Show, and Life with Father* depicted Blacks in subservient roles as maids, cooks, "mammies", deadbeats, or criminals and were necessary stereotypes to maintain a racial order steeped in racism and White supremacy. Citing studies by Winston (1982), Barlow and Dates (1990), and Ely (1991), Gray demonstrates how these shows continue an active construction of the social and cultural rules of race relations between blacks and whites. Representations of blackness responded to socio-cultural changes with more sanitized images of blacks during the racially tense times of the 1960s, "authentic" portrayals of black life in urban communities proliferated in the 1970s as a response to Civil Rights claims for increased presence in the media, and stories of upward mobility and middle class attainment by the 1980s. Other popular media display a similar pattern, as displayed through the changes to

the nature, amount and visibility of black characters in children's books during times of increased racial unrest and uncertainty (Pescosolido et al. 1997). Overall, an inverse relationship exists between racial conflict and visibility of black characters, a consistent absence of female or male black main characters, minimal change to depictions of meaningful black-white interactions, and periods of increased black visibility was linked to dominant Afrocentric narratives.

As a particularly poignant moment of racialization on television, Gray locates a notable shift in the manner of racial representation, specifically of black representation, in *The Cosby Show* that repositioned and recoded blackness. On one hand, the show promoted positive images of black middle class life. On the other hand, it also failed to realistically contend with the continued severity and pervasiveness of racism and effectively "submerged other sites, tensions, and points of difference by consistently celebrating mobility, unlimited consumerism, and the patriarchal nuclear family" (Gray 1995:82). Through audience reception data, Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis (1992) demonstrate the role of the discourses and representations of *The Cosby Show* in constructions of racial meaning. For white respondents, the example of the Huxtables confirmed their beliefs in a post-racist and post-racial society. Through education, hard work and proper family values, race was no longer a viable threat to black upward mobility and any indication of continued disenfranchisement or inequality was as a result of individual failure, unwillingness or laziness. Black respondents, on the other hand, saw the unreality of the Huxtables, for the most part acknowledging the flawed logic of a truly colorblind meritocracy. But they positioned their support for these representations

because of the over-abundance of negative representations of blacks and black families on television.

Efforts to reclaim and redefine the contours of meaning also manifest through the proliferation of female presence in hip hop and rap music videos. Hip hop and rap, at once a site for repressed creative expression and validation of blackness and at other times bemoaned for its glorification of violence and negative stereotypes of black males and culture, also drew attention and criticism for hypersexualized images of black women and their consistent objectification in lyrics and music videos. By focusing on black female performers, Rana Emerson (1995) examines the ways in which black women use popular culture and finds that in some instances they reproduce gender and racial oppression, others are more successful at redefinition and opposition, and a number of attempts produce ambivalent results. Her conclusions echo the findings of Jhally and Lewis (1992) and Gray (1995), that whatever the maneuver of cultural negotiation, they exist within the confines of dominant common sense, whereby some hegemonic reproduction is unavoidable. Therefore when Missy Elliot advances her counter-hegemonic narratives, appearance and style of a powerful, sexually mature and confident woman, she does so against the backdrop of a peep show, reinforcing traditional and oppressive styles of normative male sexual dominance and desire. Rather than a clear reproduction of patriarchal values, Emerson contends that in efforts to construct an alternate discourse and representation that does not submerge (or erase) sexuality under gender equality results in a seeming contradiction. While not complete, or perfect, examples like Missy Elliot work to challenge and dislodge the stability and power of the

Jezebel stereotype and controlling image of black female sexuality as insatiable, uncontrollable and deviant. John Fiske (1996) also examines the power of the Jezebel image and its articulation of race, sexuality, and gender through the media representation of Anita Hill during the Senate hearings on her accusations of sexual harassment by Clarence Thomas. Representing one dimension of the various articulations of race, gender and sexuality through Anita Hill was the concerted effort to hypersexualize her motives and actions; this connection between race and sexuality not without historical precedence. The black male body, as criminal, sexual predator and menace, represents the white fear of the fragility of a racist social order, but in the case of Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas, the black man was conservative, Republican, and professionally successful, the "tamed" black man. It is for this complex of race, gender, sexuality and politics that this familiar racist trope was more visibly enacted on Anita Hill. The Jezebel image and stereotype is rearticulated to silence, discount and ultimately disenfranchise her claims. Fiske notably demonstrates the interconnectedness of race, gender, sexuality, class and politics and the perversely creative ways racist narratives and logic reproduce themselves according to any given climate.

Gender, Class, and Sexuality in Racial Formation

The importance of the intersection of sexuality, race, and the conquest of the Americas is discussed by Joane Nagel (2003) in *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*. Sexualized constructions of native women directly coincided with the construction of the Americas as a virtually uninhabited, natural and

wild land to be conquered. Nagel analyzes an early 17th century drawing, "America" by Theodor Galle of Vespucci "discovering" America in which the artist depicts

> a standing Vespucci who is clothed and surrounded by the paraphernalia of technology, with the uncivilized America – a reclining woman who is naked and surrounded by wild animals and cannibals. Vespucci is the modern, masculine scientifically inquisitive traveler, America is the primitive, feminine new world, open to discovery and exploration". (64-65)

While the other major account of encounters with native peoples by Columbus[8] disagreed largely with Vespucci, Nagel notes a significant commonality – they both found them highly attractive, especially the women, noting the light tone of their skin, "as white as any in Spain" (Columbus quoted in Nagel 2003). The sexual fantasies of white men regarding the always available, always promiscuous, and always compliant native women continued on with the European travelers that followed. While all sexual encounters between indigenous women and white males were not forced[9], the rape of Indian women often preceded Indian-white conflict. While honest accounts in the news of such sexual violence was virtually non-existent, the "Indian captivity" narratives of whites were

[8] Columbus described native peoples as naïve, childlike, primitive, and cooperative, while Vespucci's account describe a violent and treacherous experience filled with "cruel torturers, depraved cannibals, treacherous men, duplicitous, promiscuous, and incestuous" (Nagel 2003:65).

[9] Nagel cites James Ronda's four reasons why Indians might have willingly entered into sexual relations with whites: 1) trade for European goods like ironware, paint, and cloth; 2) forge commercial links which were sealed through sexual relations; 3) express native hospitality; and 4) to obtain any transfer of spiritual power from non-Indians. Nagel also cites Albert Hurtado that while agreeing for the most part with Ronda, argues that many reports of sexual encounters were coerced, rape, forced prostitution, and slavery.

particularly popular publications and instrumental, according to Roy Pearce and Rebecca Faery, in shaping a national birth story that privileged whiteness and masculinity in what would be American history (Nagel 2003). These narratives, according to Richard Van Der Beets and Richard Slotkin, functioned as religious allegories of the redemptive process and path of suffering that whites experience before they return to white, Christian civilization. Brutal accounts of sexual and physical violence by Indian men to white women were common aspects of these narratives, as was the sexualization of and desire for the Indian male, exemplified in the popular 19th century novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, by James Fenimore Cooper (Ibid). The simultaneous desire for and disgust of the constructed sexuality of native peoples rests on the juxtaposition of the images and narratives of the ravished white female captive and the seductive Indian princess (Pocahantas).

From here, constructions of masculinity in relation to whiteness and the native male are possible. The Indian male represents co-existing thoughts of sexual desire and terror, such that the Indian male was simultaneously constructed as a site of sexual pleasure and thrill for white women and as a dangerous and competing sexual threat to white men. These enduring sexualized images of indigenous peoples played a central role in the imagining of the U.S. West, in the justification of warfare, and served to condone the political, economic, racial, and cultural agendas to "improve" the Indian, as benevolent efforts to "civilize" and "assimilate" (Ibid). Furthermore, Nagel argues that native masculinity and sexuality played a role in the construction of white male masculinity and sexuality. As she notes:

> There is another side to sex and conquest that involves not white men and native women or white women and native men; it involves only men – red and white. This installment in the American chronicle of sex and conquest centers the construction of U.S. nationalism and American manhood out of the ruins and stolen remnants of native nations and masculinities. (78)

The widespread appropriation of masculine Indianness[10] coincided as two major historical events unfolded – the institutionalization of the reservation system and a general anxiety over the state of white, American masculinity as the country underwent rapid industrialization at the turn of the 20th century, leaving the primarily agricultural economy and rural life behind.

The creation of the American white working class identity as a "self-conscious social category" in relation to blackness, as a response to the wage dependency that a capitalist economy demands, further solidified an already operating white supremacist ideology that marked blacks as racial subjects, while whites assumed the hegemonic position that is "normal", "dominant", and thus invisible (Roediger [1991] 2003:23). Addressing both the economic and the cultural appropriation determinants of the development of hegemonic whiteness through an examination of minstrelsy, Eric Lott ([1993] 2013) further illuminates:

[10] Nagel cites some examples that Philip Deloria uses in his book, *Playing Indian*: the costumes and make-up mimicking the Iroquois that white colonists wore during the 1773 Boston Tea Party; the use of native symbolism and simulated "Indian" ceremonies in fraternal organizations like the 19th century Improved Order of Red Men or the League of the Iroquois; the centrality of the "Indian" in organizations like the Boy Scouts and the Woodcraft Indians meant to instill in young boys American character and citizenship; and the use of "war paint", the participation in "war chants", "war dances", and "tomahawk chops" ubiquitous in various sports events (78).

> Although it arose from a white obsession with black (male) bodies which underlies white racial dread to our own day, it ruthlessly disavowed its fleshly investments through ridicule and racist lampoon…In doing so we shall find that blackface performance, the first formal public acknowledgement by whites of black culture, was based on small but significant crimes against settled ideas of racial demarcation, which indeed appear to be inevitable when white Americans enter the haunted realm of racial fantasy. Ultimately I am after some sense of how precariously nineteenth-century white working people lived their whiteness – a matter of the greatest consequence in the history of America's racial cultures and their material or institutional transactions. (4)

In her examination of the construction of an early American national character, Constance Rourke ([1931] 2004) considered three defining identities – the Yankee, the backwoodsman, and the blackface minstrel. Noting how "Americans are said to have had no childhood," Rourke examined 19th century popular culture, eventually locating the grand heart of this national-cultural formation in the characters that delighted folk audiences and imaginations (19). Much more than frivolous flights of fancy, these identities were not only shared and propagated through musical lyrics, stories, newspapers, and performances, but also represented the earliest foundations of a uniquely American character. The American began with the Yankee, the fast-talking, unflappable, resourceful and plucky survivor, never without a clever retort. The trailblazer, the backswoodsman, or "the gamecock" in Rourke's words, was the epitome of the adventurous, pioneering American spirit and character. "He was not only half horse, half alligator," he was "a steamboat, an earthquake." Concentrated in the West and Southwest, the location of tall tales, our rugged, imperfect, and adventurous American Odyssey, like the story "of an old gentleman so absent-minded that he tucked his pantaloons into bed

one night and hung himself on the back of his chair, where he froze to death," or stories of impossible triumph and resolve like the "captain who was cut in two in a fight, joined himself together with glue, finished his enemy, and lay down to sleep," later to find that "the glue had melted and that a thief had run away with his thighs" (xvi). Finally, the significance of the blackface minstrel, the practice of "white masquerade", occupied a uniquely emotional and shared psychic place atypical of the Yankee and the backwoodsman. While acknowledging the function of minstrel shows to legitimize and solidify white supremacy in the wake of chattel slavery, Rourke's conclusions saw a deeper, complex importance in this wildly popular form of folk entertainment. Indeed, minstrel shows served to reproduce racist images of blacks as childlike and buffoonish. But, minstrel shows also expressed another dimension to the construction of blackness and whiteness – the dimensions of fear and envy – as themes of the possession of secret powers and wisdom unattainable to whites were just as present.

Further guiding the theoretical orientations of this analysis and discussion address the supra-discursive elements alluded to in David Roediger's ([1991] 2003), Eric Lott's ([1993] 2013), and Constance Rourke's ([1931] 2004) examinations of the interconnectedness of race, class, racial hierarchy and racism, identity construction, popular culture, and the performance in comedy in its unique American articulation, through the important contributions of Lacanian psychoanalytic and philosophical work on race ideology, as specifically understood by Slavoj Zizek (1993). Rejecting past analyses of nationalism as purely discursive, he argues:

> The element which holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated. This relationship toward the Thing, structured by means of fantasies, is what is at stake when we speak of the menace to our "way of life" presented by the Other: it is what is threatened when, for example, a white Englishman is panicked because of the growing presence of "aliens." What he wants to defend at any price is *not* reducible to the so-called set of values that offer support to national identity. This Nation-Thing is determined by a series of contradictory properties. It appears to us as "our Thing" (perhaps we could say *cosa nostra*), as something accessible only to us, as something "they," the others, cannot grasp; nonetheless it is something constantly menaced by "them." It appears as what gives plenitude and vivacity to our life, and yet the only way we can determine it is by resorting to different versions of the same empty tautology…All we can do is enumerate disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiation ceremonies, in short, all the details by which is made visible the unique way a community *organizes its enjoyment*. (201, emphasis in original)

Zizek continues to explain that this "empty tautology" must compel a deeper attachment than performative discursive practices account for, which do not have enough "substance" to sustain the concept of nation, national identity, and indeed, a widespread, shared, and eternal sense of personhood. The connection to race ideology is easily established for Zizek then as the necessary "threat" to the integrity of the nation:

> Nationalism thus presents a privileged domain of the eruption of enjoyment into the social field. The national Cause is ultimately nothing but the way subjects of a given ethnic community organize their enjoyment through national myths. What is therefore at stake in ethnic tensions is always the possession of the national Thing. We always impute to the "other" an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the "other" is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the "excess" that pertains to this way: the smell of "their" food, "their" noisy songs and dances, "their" strange manners, "their" attitude to work. To the racist, the "other" is either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living

> on our labor, and it is quite amusing to notice the haste with which one passes from reproaching the other with a refusal to work to reproaching him for the theft of work. The basic paradox is that our Thing is conceived as something inaccessible to the other and at the same time threatened by him. (202-203)

The theft of the white male's enjoyment is directly attributable to what black masculinity possesses (and thus withholds) and is gravely intent on acquiring it. As Zizek reasons:

> It is too easy to dispose of this problematic by pointing out that what we have here is simply the transposition, the ideological displacement, of the effective socioeconomic antagonisms of today's capitalism. The problem is that, while this is undoubtedly true, *it is precisely through such a displacement that desire is constituted*. What we gain by transposing the perception of inherent social antagonisms into the fascination with the Other (Jew, Japanese…) is the fantasy-organization of desire. The Lacanian thesis that enjoyment is ultimately always enjoyment of the Other, i.e., enjoyment supposed, imputed to the Other, and that, conversely, the hatred of the Other's enjoyment is always the hatred of one's own enjoyment, is perfectly exemplified by this logic of "theft of enjoyment." What are fantasies about the Other's special, excessive enjoyment – about the black's superior sexual potency and appetite, about the Jew's or the Japanese's special relationship toward money and work – if not precisely *so many ways, for us, to organize our enjoyment*? Do we not find enjoyment precisely in fantasizing about the Other's enjoyment, in this ambivalent attitude toward it? Do we not obtain satisfaction by means of the very supposition that the Other enjoys in a way inaccessible to us? Does not the Other's enjoyment exert such a powerful fascination because in it we represent to ourselves our own innermost relationship toward enjoyment? And, conversely, is the anti-Semitic capitalist's hatred of the Jew not the hatred of the excess that pertains to capitalism itself, i.e., of the excess produced by its inherent antagonistic nature? Is capitalism's hatred of the Jew not the hatred of its own innermost, essential feature? For this reason, it is not sufficient to point out how the racist's Other presents a threat to our identity. We should rather inverse this proposition: the fascinating image of the Other gives a body to our own innermost split, to what is "in us more than ourselves" and thus prevents us from achieving full identity with ourselves. *The hatred of the Other is the hatred of our own excess of enjoyment*. (206, emphasis in original)

Considering the tangled relationships of race and racism, popular culture, white working class consciousness, and covert psychoanalytic orientations toward the "other" that continue to manifest beyond symbolic reproduction, the analysis and discussion aims to consider multiple and varying lenses of social analysis, drawing from the abundant previous scholarship on aspects of all of these elements.

Television and Production

One of the most important, influential, extensively debated, and pervasive cultural and technological innovations of the 20th century is television. Never before had a medium possessed the ability to reach unparalleled numbers of individuals. Some praised television's potential for democratization and its role in creating and maintaining the rational, enlightened and civilized citizen (Park 1972 and Czitrom 1982). Others underlined the cultural hegemonic workings of a burgeoning industrial and capitalist economy with television as one of its major methods of compliance. This compliance is achieved because of the repetition and predictability of television; its lack of narrative ingenuity or conflict stifle a critical and conscious individual resulting in an impaired capacity for resistance to an oppressive capitalist structure (Adorno 1945). Critics continue to praise television's potential for populist expression and representation, rail against the glorification of violence, or lament the medium's central role in creating a cultural wasteland. The effects on the individual and by association, societal effects, continue to be debated, but the significance is without question. Current approaches acknowledge issues of power, inequality and representation while incorporating less

deterministic views of cultural influence and agency (Grindstaff and Turow 2006). The influence of television on the social world remains uncontested but the multivocality of meaning as interpreted, negotiated, and processed was an important development in understanding relationships between cultural objects, cultural change (or hegemony) and human agency. Contrary to Adorno's hypothesis, audiences are active and engaged constructing, unpacking, and reconstructing meanings attached to race, gender, sexuality, and social and policy issues like poverty, healthcare, and marriage (Fiske 1992). But television also functions as entertainment by identifying and representing familiar cultural narratives, preoccupations, speech, styles and behaviors that are dominant (Gray 1995). As a site of an avalanche of images, messages, reproductions and identities, television provides choices along with entertainment and celebration of cultural conventions, the "cultural forum" wherein society presents, contends with, affirms, and re-evaluates its beliefs, identities, and values (Gans 1974 and Hirsch and Newcomb 1983). Douglas Kellner (1990), supportive of the potential for subversive change, emphasizes the ownership of television as well as other major institutions by capitalist interests. But this does not create an all-powerful, always oppressive force since individuals, at times, question these forms of dominant, hegemonic pressures. Television is not only a cultural forum, but a cultural forum steeped in compliance and celebration, struggle and resistance, and intermittent social reform and change. Thus, television is born of the social order and equally subject to it. As the site of cultural reproduction and interpretation, positioned within a stratified society, television's development has been contradictory and complex as it has proven to serve both dominant and peripheral

objectives (Williams 1974). The factors determining a show's syndication are far from simplistic, neither wholly representing production executive's biases or cultural tastes, the popularity of particular actors and characters, or even market research and ratings data (Gitlin 1985). Even earnest attempts to promote television shows and movies with a social change objective, when they survive, undergo multiple revisions from varying parties and at seemingly endless junctures. Not without its complications, Joshua Gamson (1998) presents a largely celebratory vision of the role of day time talk shows in creating a space for the "freaks" of society, to be seen, an opportunity to be heard (and consumed), and to be made visible. The broader, conceptual effects challenge and expose boundaries between "us" and "them," and both the politics and paradoxes of visibility. From an ethnographic production of culture lens, Laura Grindstaff (2002) also considers day time talk television and illustrates the laboriously orchestrated creation of emotional talk and "realistic" stories and portrayals of the everyday American. Analogized to the climactic ejaculation shots in pornographic film, day time talk shows producers have a daily hang-wringing and pressured existence, cultivating their own sublime release, the "money shot", whether through stories of humiliation from uncovered secret sexual relationships, unbridled rage and violence, or the emotional reunification of estranged sisters. Television is a cultural forum on which this process unfolds on which "the metaphoric fault lines of American society are expressed and worked through, not by imposing a monolithic or dominant viewpoint but by exploring ideological contradictions through multiple and competing perspectives" (Grindstaff and Turow 2006). In its classic formulation (Gramsci [1971] 2012), the very label of hegemonic cultural meaning

suggests an absence of direct, coercive force and a widely accepted, thus invisible, application of meanings, norms, attitudes, styles and values. By definition, any departure from dominant interpretations, whether successfully oppositional or not, indicates a challenge to hegemonic stability, without clearly illustrating a change in cultural meaning (Gamson et al. 1992). Popular media reproduces contemporary social conflicts as they take on political, economic, and social varieties (Kellner 1995). Out of this reconceptualization, two distinct realms of media images and discourses emerge – one accepted as representations true to reality and the other contested sites of interpretation (Gamson et al. 1992). The proliferation of ambivalence as noted by Weaver's (2011) notion of "liquid racism" are evidence of an increasing amount of interpretation and meaning, neither falling neatly in line with reality, but without clear indications of the production of new, alternate, and oppositional versions (63).

CHAPTER 3

HEGEMONIC DISCOURSES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE

Overview of Results

Before delving into the manner in which racial hegemony is negotiated through sketch comedy from the 1960s to the 2000s, as the general quantitative consideration of race and sketch comedy will display not only has a logic to it, but also confirms past scholarship on racial formation, how it parlays with intersecting areas like gender, sexuality, and historical context, and proffers possible fresh perspectives on race in the United States. The interpretive analysis, while in a grounded subjectivity, also opens doors to trends related to narrative, discourse, and manner of representations that occur when the social expectation is to laugh. In this brief overview before the comparative analysis and discussion of representative transgressive comedic sketches across time, the percentages discussed, while not generalizable in the same statistical sense, retain importance due to their interpretive reoccurrence in sketch comedy over time. Therefore, this overview will focus on two general aspects: 1) of racial discourses in sketch comedy statistically and its relationships to race, gender, and time and 2) of hegemonic discourses and representations of race drawn both from reflections back to quantitative trends after initial qualitative analysis and reflection and from discursive and semiotic interpretive analytic tools. The ultimate goal is to reckon with an unavoidably painful, messy, and contradictory, but also triumphant national history of race relations, beginning with an analysis of examples that neatly reproduce racial hegemony and the ways in which they

dually transgress discursively and representationally in other social arenas, like gender, class, and sexuality.

Table 1. *Frequency Tables For Racial Discourse, Racial Performance, And Racial Slurs*

Variable	Yes	No
Racial Discourse	24.3% (272)	75.7% (848)
Racial Performance	6.6% (74)	93.4% (1,046)
Racial Slurs	5.8% (65)	94.2% (1,055)

N=1,120 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

Out of the 1,120 sketches analyzed, a little under a quarter contained racial discourse, as displayed in Table 1. Racial performance – performing a different race than your own – was not common, with 93.4% of the sketches not containing these instances. Equally uncommon, only 5.8% of the time, was the use of racial slurs.

Table 2. *Frequency Table For Racial Proportion Of Characters*

Racial Proportion	%
Balanced	14.6% (162)
Black	14.2% (158)
White	66.6% (738)
Hispanic	4.6% (51)

n=1,109 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

Table 2 shows us that white characters dominate sketches over time, appearing 65.9% of the time, while a dominant black presence or a balanced racial proportion of characters were less common, both at 14% or so. Sketches containing a dominant Hispanic presence were uncommon, at only 4.6% of the time. Out of a total of 5,877 characters in the total amount of sketches (N=1,120), the breakdown of those characters by race is shown below in Table 3.

Table 3. *Number Of Characters By Race Across Sketches From The 1960s To 2000s*

Variable	n
Total Characters	5,877
Black Characters	1,306
White Characters	4,014
Asian Characters	115
Hispanic Characters	176
Other Race Characters	266

N=1,120 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

By dividing the number of characters across sketch comedy by time by race into the total number of both total number of characters and the total number of sketches over time, two percentages and their differentials between the two, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Number Of Characters By Race Across Sketches From The 1960s To 2000s (Percentages Within Total Number Of Characters And Within Total Number Of Sketches)*

Variable	% #Characters (n=5,877)	% Differential #Sketches (N=1,102)	% #Sketches (N=1,102)
Characters (n=5,877)	------	------	-----
Black Characters (n=1,306)	22.2%	96.3 Points	118.5%
White Characters (n=4,014)	68.3%	295.9 Points	364.2%
Asian Characters (n=115)	2%	8.4 Points	10.4%
Hispanic Characters (n=176)	3%	13 Points	16%
Other Race Characters (n=266)	4.5%	19.6 Points	24.1%

N=1,120 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

These numbers (Tables 4 and 5) reflect slightly different important points from the frequency table above regarding racial proportion of characters in a given sketch, since these numbers capture the wide portrait of the relationship between racial visibility (and invisibility) and sketch comedy in the post-Civil rights era in the United States. While

Table 2 (frequency of racial proportion of characters) can certainly stand to "prove" the current state of media representation of race and diversity – a dominance of white representation, equally low proportions of black and integrated images and interactions, and an acceptable, or "invisible", visibility and inclusion of non-white and non-black representations, but these quantitative results will be discussed in more detail, in particular regarding Hispanic and Asian representations, in the paragraphs below. Of course, these percentages refer to the proportion of characters, meaning a given sketch must have had at least 2 or more characters in any given category. For instance, in a sketch of 5 people, if 3 are white and 2 black, the sketch is coded as "balanced", regardless of the strict quantitative observation that the sketch contains one additional white person.[11] The numbers and percentages presented in Tables 3 and 4 serve to, not necessarily, contradict, but to add texture to the results regarding the examination of the frequency of racial proportions in sketch comedy. Numbers of Asian and other race characters were not included in the frequency table above due to the lack of enough of the characters of belonging to either category being in a given sketch when crosstabulation was run, therefore, the "racial proportion" variable, along with the results and discussion of crosstabulations involving that variable could not, statistically speaking, include instances when Asian characters or other race characters dominated a comedy sketch, since the instances were that rare in 1,120 sketch across four decades.

[11] This also refers to the variable "gender proportion of characters".

But, of course, Asian and other race characters appeared, from time to time, in sketch comedy from the 1960s to the 2000s, just never enough to occupy a space of full and dominant representation, but a look at the raw numbers of appearances (or representations) of the race of characters in sketch comedy reveals noteworthy trends and adds to the general operating sense of race and media in the United States, without refuting it, but rather adding to its vibrancy of understanding (Hunt 1992; Jhally and Lewis 1992; Gray 1995; and Jacobs 1999). Really, the only number-to-proportion that holds relatively similar is for sketches with white characters, and particularly here, white *visibility* – not only in terms of dominating in racial proportion to other characters in a given sketch (white characters were the dominant proportion 66.6% of the time), but also in terms of total number of white visibility throughout sketch comedy over time, with 68.3% of all characters in my sample being (N=1,120 sketches), across sketch comedy shows and across time, white. Perhaps not surprisingly, black characters were a dominant racial presence only 14.2% of the time, but appeared in 22.2% of all sketches, resulting in a *hypervisibility* of racialized representations of blackness, with little regard for equality in narrative lines – if black characters only dominate sketches 14.2% of the time, dominance in this sense can be thought of as "who has voice". But appear nearly twice as often as supporting characters, or the perhaps well-intentioned, but ultimately unfortunate, neoliberal position to increase visibility without the substance of perspective, story lines, voice, and equality, in that sense of, transcending a represented object in white-dominated stories and lives, and creating alternate, contradictory, and fresh tales of living and contending with race in the U.S. In other words, representations, or numbers

without teeth, is not a current trend in race and comedy in the United States. Furthermore, Asian, Hispanic, and other race characters, while they appear in reasonable and respectable percentages in sketch comedy over time – 2%, 3%, and 4.5%, respectively – as noted just above, had extremely low numbers of sketches in which they were a dominant racial presence, taken as a proxy for the establishment of perspective and "need" of the story, since if a story contains no Asian, Hispanic, or other race characters, it is likely the narrative does not include their perspectives. Of course, a story could contain content about raced characters, without the presence of non-white characters in the story, but then those are, by definition, stories about race from a white perspective, an entirely valid and necessary component of race and comedy on television. Yet when the percentages between racial proportions of characters and the number of characters across the sample are compared, the persistent linkages between white (especially male) desire/hatred for blackness – as representation *only* – are sadly dominating the shape of comedy and race on television, representation, perspectives, and stories, and the ways in which we continue to contend with what we mean by "diversity" and "integration". And the observations redouble themselves when we looks at these relationships within racial categories and sketch comedy, particularly for the diverse amounts of peoples belonging to the Asian and Hispanic diasporas and those that are racially ambiguous, bi or multiracial, or do not, understandably so, fit into our racial hierarchy, even as it is defined in this study herein. Asian characters appear 2% of the time, Hispanic characters 3%, and other race characters 4.5%, despite having virtually no instances of a dominant presence in any sketch in the sample from the 1960s to the 2000s.

Table 5. *Frequency Table For Gender Proportion Of Characters*

Gender Proportion	%
Balanced	25% (280)
Female	8.8% (98)
Male	66.2% (741)

n=1,119 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

Turning to the gender proportion of characters, Table 5 displays the low frequency of female characters in sketch comedy, while male characters appeared nearly 70% of the time. A quarter of the time, sketches contained a balanced proportion of characters by gender.

The following three crosstabs show the relationships between racial discourse and time, racial proportion of characters, and gender proportion of characters. All crosstabs are statistically significant, indicating that these trends can be applied to any sketch comedy show in the US from the 1960s to the 2000s.

Table 6. *Racial Discourse By Year*

	Year			
Racial Discourse	1960	1970	1990	2000
Yes	17.5%	24.2%	15%	41.9%
No	82.5%	75.8%	85%	58.1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(120)	(360)	(387)	(253)

Goodman and Kruskal tau = 0.15, p<.001
N=1,120 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

Racial discourse in sketch comedy is related to time, with a steady upward trend, with the exception of the 1990s, such that close to half of the sketches in the 2000s contained racial discourse. While many charge comedy with being erratic and outside of the realm of serious (and discernable) cultural production, this table indicates otherwise. It is of note that the production of racial discourses in the 1960s and the 1990s are nearly similar, with a slightly higher rate, nearly 3 percentage points, in the 1960s. While the relationship of racial visibility is connected to wider societal racial climates, with less visibility of non-white characterizations during racially tense times and confirms the relatively low rates of racial discourses in sketch comedy during the 1960s and the 1990s, the high production of racial discourses in the 2000s decade does not necessarily suggest the move toward a time of societal accord regarding race and racism (Pescosolido et al.

1997). The lower production of racial discourses in the 1960s and the 1990s follows this logic, as is well known, the 1960s were a period of intense societal examination, critique, agitation, and violence regarding racial politics in the United States. The vicious Rodney King beating by Los Angeles police in 1991 and the proceeding L.A. Riots in 1992, responsible for numerous deaths, injuries, and the destruction of primarily Korean owned businesses in predominately black neighborhoods certainly shaped the 1990s and could explain why the 1990s produced the lowest amount of racial discourses. The relationship between racial protest, or attempts to reconfigure racial hierarchy, is connected to a virtual absence of black characters in children's books, from 1958-1964, with a spike of representation in the early 1970s, and a stabilization of representation from 1975-1993, at 20-30% of the time (Ibid). Linking the influence of societal racial climates to the roles of cultural gatekeepers (children's book publishers in this case) and the frequency and manner of black representation in these books is echoed in production of racial discourses in another area of cultural production, but with some divergences. If sketch comedy followed a similar pattern over time, the production of racial discourses should have maintained a stabilization of the presence of racial discourses from the 1970s to the 1990s. Instead, sketch comedy shows, sampled around the most controversial shows in each decade, seem to have the ability to maintain, comparatively, a steady presence from the 1960s to the 1990s (of course with fluctuations during particularly tense periods of racial unrest and change) and double by the 2000s. Surely, the production of racial discourses, the mere talking about race or racism, does not necessarily indicate transgression, or major societal shifts in racial ideology, but the main point here is to

highlight the unique nature of comedy as a cultural forum that does not experience similar periods of invisibility of racial discourses or visibility as other cultural forums. The high production of racial discourses in the 2000s in sketch comedy shows could indeed relate to the solidification of the colorblind racial project, allowing for a societal context in which the discussion of race in popular culture is encouraged due to the propagation of the myth of a post-racial society, the contemporary charlatan for racial hegemony.

Given the recent tragic and controversial deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, to name a few, the nationwide movement "Black Lives Matter", and the charged civil unrest and protests in Ferguson, MO along with the debut of sketch comedy shows like *Key and Peele* and sitcoms like *Fresh Off The Boat* and *Black-ish* may indicate a shift in the relationships, both in past scholarship and in my results, between racial unrest and the production of discourses and representations of race in popular culture. Including the 2010 decade in the sample in the future may indicate some changes to how comedy specifically negotiates racial discourses, how historical context and racial unrest is related to the production of racial discourses, and perhaps the rise of a racial project that transforms the colorblind racism era, prevalent in the 1990s and the 2000s, for better or for worse.

Table 7. *Racial Discourse By Racial Proportion Of Characters*

	Racial Proportion Of Characters			
Racial Discourse	Balanced	Black	White	Hispanic
Yes	42.6%	26.6%	16.7%	68.6%
No	57.4%	73.4%	83.3%	31.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(162)	(158)	(738)	(51)

Goodman & Kruskal tau = .020, p<.001
n=1,109 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

Table 7 indicates that racial discourse is most likely to occur when a sketch has either a balanced racial proportion of characters or a Hispanic proportion of characters, less likely to occur in sketches with a dominant black presence, and least likely to occur in sketches with a dominant white presence. The function of Bakhtinian heteroglossia could explain this relationship, in that discourses that are strongly double-voiced, require multiple perspectives that are independent of one another. If Bakhtin is correct, hegemonic discourses are decidedly single-voiced; they have a well-defined and strong purpose to achieve meaning. Irony, parody and satire are, on the other hand, decidedly double-voiced, with distinct voices that are "hostile" to one another and that compete for meaning. Given the distinct ways that racial ideology in the United States shape micro and macro levels of social identities and economic, cultural, and political opportunities, resulting in distinct ways of seeing and experiencing the social world, the relationship of

racial identities to the production of racial discourses should not be a surprising outcome. The combination of distinct racial proportions of characters (a balanced racial proportion of characters is associated with racial discourses 42.6% of the time), or the presence of multiple perspectives, results in higher rates of racial discourses than single perspectives (majority white characters result in racial discourses 16.7% of the time and majority black characters 26.6% of the time), with the exception of a majority Hispanic proportion of characters. Sketches with a dominant Hispanic proportion of characters is related to racial discourses 68.6% of the time, but as noted above the frequency of a majority Hispanic proportion of characters occurred only 4.6% of the time. *Mind of Mencia*, starring Carlos Mencia, functioned as a stand-in for the then gaping hole *Chappelle's Show* had left in Comedy Central's line-up, after Dave Chappelle's sudden departure after two blockbuster seasons of his show, *Chappelle's Show* in the early 2000s. Hoping to not lose the momentum the network had enjoyed from the widespread popularity of *Chappelle's Show*, the feel and pace of *Mind of Mencia* mimicked *Chappelle's Show* but the content belied this attempt at replacement. While perceived as a show that was steeped in racial discourses and critique, *Chappelle's Show* examined a wide range of topics, from critiques of popular culture, politics, heterosexual sex and relationships, along with examinations and critiques of race and racism in the United States. In the first season of *Chappelle's Show* (n=117 sketches), 33.3% (n=39 sketches) contained racial discourse, compared to 65.9% (n=60 sketches) of the sketches that contained racial discourse in the first season of *Mind of Mencia* (n=91 sketches). Furthermore, Chappelle co-wrote all of the sketches for *Chappelle's Show* with Neal Brennan, while Carlos

Mencia was credited as a "creator" of the show with his namesake, while the writers for the show were Chris McGuire, Brian Rubenstein, Ted Sarnowski, and Steve Trevino. In short, the relationship between a dominant Hispanic proportion of characters to racial discourses on *Mind of Mencia* is highly tempered by these intervening factors; in a way, the high rate of racial discourses in *Mind of Mencia* could be attributed, by proxy, to a dominant white presence, even if the characters enacting the scripts were Hispanic.

Furthermore, Hispanic characters and other racial identities that are neither black or white, remain relatively invisible in sketch comedy from the 1960s to the 2000s and were typically targets of mockery and racist mimicry from the 1960s to the 1990s, even as transgressive discourses and representations of race, most typically regarding blacks (from both predominately white and black shows), were simultaneously occurring. The 2000s include more representations of groups of color outside of the black-white binary, but produce largely ambivalent or hegemonic representations and discourses of race. Further analysis and discussion of these trends and observations are addressed in the following sections, but it is important to briefly allude to these larger trends to contextualize the relationship of Hispanic proportions of characters to production of racial discourses to avoid misinterpretation, or to place undue significance on this trend.

Table 8. *Racial Discourse By Gender Proportion Of Characters*

	Gender Proportion Of Characters		
Racial Discourse	Balanced	Female	Male
Yes	23.9%	9.2%	26.5%
No	76.1%	90.8%	73.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	(280)	(98)	(741)

Goodman and Kruskal tau = .013, p<.01
n=1,119 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

Racial discourse is also related to the gender proportion of characters, with about the same rate of racial discourse for sketches either with a dominant male or balanced gender proportion of characters. Sketches with mostly female characters is related to racial discourse 9.2% of the time. Noting the close relationship between emerging American white masculinity and working class consciousness, Eric Lott ([1993] 2013) also underlines the integral role of the minstrel show, with its simultaneously earnest and troubling "courtship" of black masculinity by specifically Northern, urban white men. These public, widely enjoyed manifestations of largely imagined and co-created performances of blackness contained a

> certain dynamic of masculinity or, conversely, 'unmanning' seems to have been at work here, making the theft of black forms more urgent, if not indeed more pregnant. Codes of black and white manhood gave the exchange its force, a fact enlarged upon in the minstrel show itself. A look at white minstrel performers reveals that a gendered logic of exchange, a

> kind of commerce between men, facilitated the cultural expropriation central to blackface minstrelsy. (51)

Further projecting the ripple effects of these spectacles of black masculinity are the traditions of American bohemianism and other cultural styles and traditions enacted by middle class white men that, through a homosocial exchange of masculine racializations, continue on in contemporary times (Ibid). The nation's first cultural form was not only performative, grounded in comedic revelry and tension relief, but also always about the self-discovery of white masculinity vis-à-vis a black masculinity likely created from Lacanian jouissance – finding that substance to fill the deepest need while retaining some semblance of manufactured authenticity (Ibid and Zizek 1993). The trends indicated in the table above can be considered a contemporary manifestation and renders the relationship between the production of racial discourses and the largely masculine proportion of characters in sketch comedy wholly sensible, given the development of racialized comedic spectacles in the United States. In a sense, American comedy is fated to be a cultural form that performs the negotiation of white masculinity through black masculinity and is a damning indication of just how close our national cultural history is to our current post-Civil Rights era. If and how the manner of exchange has unfolded in contemporary sketch comedy indicates transformations, retentions, or a combination of both, will be addressed herein, with a discussion of the interpretive analysis of transgressive discourses and representations of race in the next chapter. While the statistical survey of sketch comedy from the 1960s to the 2000s affirms, in particular, previous scholarship on comedy, race, and gender, the following interpretive analysis and

discussion considers the winding ways of general attempts at counterhegemonic formations, how they reinforce, ignore, or also challenge intersecting social arenas. Furthermore, insights into the limits of transgressive discourses and representations of race as they collide with racial ideology through a consideration of hegemonic discourses and representations of race, other planes of difference, and into the boundaries that comedy constructs, as it simultaneously works to tear them down, will be considered below.

The largest data set for the 1970s decade, also the most transgressive time period for race in sketch comedy generally, is *Saturday Night Live*, with a total of 238 sketches, or 21.2% of the entire sample over 4 decades. Out of these 238 sketches in 1977, 75 of them contained some form of racial discourse or content, representing a third of the entire content of season 3. *The Richard Pryor Show*, although canceled by NBC after 4 episodes and short-lived, was the second most transgressive show (after *Chappelle's Show*), not across time, contained racial discourse in 12 of 39 total sketches, or 30.7% and *The Carol Burnett Show*, the wildly popular sketch comedy and variety show that reigned confidently in the 60s and the 70s, only contained racial discourse 2.5% of the time (n=80 sketches), while reveling in some of the most hegemonic and racist racial performances of Hispanic femininity, masculinity, and sexuality. *The Carol Burnett Show* was also, surprisingly enough, among one of the most transgressive sketch comedy shows on

gender (also a rare occurrence) and, in particular, the humanization, popularization, and acceptance of working class whiteness[12] across the entire data set.

This seemingly strange ability for comedic forms to represent both extreme manifestations of hegemonic cultural meanings and also possess the role of the "truth teller" – the societal position that is sometimes the only consistent advocate for transgression makes the trends present in shows that are largely ambivalent toward race or in which race is invisible, if they have the rare ability to challenge multiple planes of social oppression, be it gender, class, sexuality, ability, race, or class, can also produce highly successful and powerful proclamations against racial hierarchy, without the unnecessary burden of "white guilt". *Kids in the Hall*, the 1990s Canadian sensation that was an early example of the emergence of a serious societal consideration and contention with white masculinity and femininity, middle class life, same sex desires and stories, and, in a very real sense, discovering the notion of "whiteness," the all-male cast frequently performed in drag (32.7% of the time, n=116 sketches), compared to the performance of drag 5.1% of the time across sketch comedy, nearly 7 times more often) and made concrete the power of gender roles over agency in pitch perfect delivery. On the other hand, not all shows that remain ambivalent toward race necessarily indicates

[12] So much so that the series of sketches featuring Carol Burnett as the lovingly grumbling, underappreciated, and slightly repressed character Eunice and her intense, simultaneously strange and familiar, relationships with her perfect sister and her stubborn and clueless parents, in the sketches known as "the family", that Vicki Lawrence, who starred in *The Carol Burnett Show*, went on to join the cast of *All In the Family*, an intentional iteration of Eunice's white, working class family life.

transgression in other social arenas, or a lack of intention in the ambivalence – a type of what Slavoj Zizek (1993) would describe as a way to keep the "problem" going, more an indication of the majority's interest in keeping racism (or nationalism) going for a form of ascetic punishment and satiation – as is the case with *Saturday Night Live*, the longest running and highly influential, arguably, the most influential comedic cultural forum we have in determining celebrity status today. As Zizek (1993) explains,

> [a]nd yet in spite of this self-reflective incorporation of the liberal, 'socially conscious' ingredients, the *fantasy remains thoroughly the same*, its efficiency in structuring our space of desire intact. The truly radical critique of ideology should therefore go beyond the self-congratulatory 'social analyses' which continue to participate in the fantasy that sustains the object of their critique and to search for ways to sap the force of this underlying fantasy-frame itself – in short, to perform something akin to the Lacanian 'going-through fantasy'. (213, emphasis in original)

In this case, the comedic style is to include race and topics related to race – most notably, by examining topics of extreme, or "serious" forms of racism, like the Ku Klux Klan, chattel slavery, or the most extraordinary case studies of non-whites, particularly blacks, that manage to eclipse multiple levels of racist hierarchy and are exemplars of "getting over" our racist history. This generally applies to *Saturday Night Live's* brand of conjuring the unpredictable potential of comedy and so largely results in a hegemonic reproduction and affirmation of planes of difference, which should not obscure their attempts at acknowledging a hierarchical world, without knowing exactly how to proceed thereafter. What is interesting is that this analysis has revealed that not knowing is not necessarily a weakness. While *Kids in the Hall* practically never examined race (racial

discourse occurred 1.7% of the time), when they did in 2 sketches out of 116 sketches, all of the instances were thoughtful, measured, and brave. A show that clearly actively transgressed in more than one arena of social categorization can dually embrace whiteness and transgress racial hegemony, in their own authentic manifestation of the lasting effects of race ideology. In a sense, while the reoccurrence is not common, the contention within white shows with race ideology, however imperfect, may perhaps be the most reliable ledger of the process of that which is normal, a glaring example of how the status quo is defined. In the progenitor's words on the development of a novel form of power other than coercive power, famously known as hegemony, Gramsci ([1971] 2012) explains:

> For instruction to be wholly distinct from education, the pupil would have to be pure passivity, a 'mechanical receiver' of abstract notions – which is absurd and is anyway 'abstractly' denied by the supporters of pure educativity precisely in their opposition to mere mechanistic instruction. The 'certain' becomes 'true' in the child's consciousness. But the child's consciousness is not something 'individual' (still less individuated), it reflects the sector of civil society in which the child participates, and the social relations which are formed within his family, his neighborhood, his village, etc. The individual consciousness of the overwhelming majority of children reflects social and cultural relations which are different from and antagonistic to those which are represented in the school curricula: thus the 'certain' of an advanced culture becomes 'true' in the framework of a fossilised and anachronistic culture. There is no unity between school and life, and so there is no automatic unity between instruction and education. In the school, the nexus between instruction and education can only be realised by the living work of the teacher. For this he must be aware of the contrast between the type of culture and society which he represents and the type of culture and society represented by his pupils, and conscious of his obligation to accelerate and regulate the child's formation in conformity with the former and in conflict with the latter. (35-36)

Clearly, hegemonic reproduction is dangerous and risky, but through the comedic form – with its underlying irony and shifting, albeit tectonic plates of limitless potential – can be an opportunity to honestly look at our status of hegemonic control, how it is manifesting, how we are contending with it, whether we are succeeding or failing, or just apathetic. While a form of hegemonic control and reproduction is indeed sustained by the practice of invisibility, whether that be through ignoring the problem, secretly resenting those that insist on challenging hegemonic power, or remaining silent, ambivalent, and generally uncomfortable with that power, these examples from *Kids in the Hall*, not known or "expected to" be an edgy comedy show about race, can be considered a model for how those in dominant positions (whiteness) can voice critique across difference. As the trend suggests though, there is evidence to suggest that by, in a way, *practicing* difference through *multiple* planes of difference and inequality encourages the development of a form of secondary, or an acquired, curated type of double consciousness regarding, in this case, race.

The *Smothers Brothers* show contained racial discourse 15.4% of the time (n=91 sketches). The *Smother Brothers* is an interesting example of potentially transgressive messages regarding race and, at times, highly disturbing examples of racial performance. For the former, the brothers frequently have sketches with George Wallace who explicitly addresses the racial dimension to poverty, racial profiling, and institutional racism (an example of transgressive sketch comedy of race, discussed in the next chapter). At the same time, many of their episodes include lavish performances at the end, evocative of

theatrical productions. Two of these, one in which the brothers reenact the travels and adventures of Marco Polo and include exaggerated, racial (examples of hegemonic and problematic racial performances, akin to *The Carol Burnett Show's* depiction of Hispanic femininity, masculinity, and sexuality) depictions of the "foreigners" he meets and in the other revisit the deeply historically inaccurate myth regarding the Pocahontas narrative, a prime example of how sexuality, particularly female native sexuality recalls Eric Lott's ([1993] 2013) keen observation that the construction of American hegemonic white masculinity is inextricably tied to a psycho-sexual and material desire to not only appropriate, but to take the fantasy so far it finds autonomy (Nagel 2003). Captured in their opening introduction to an episode, the brothers banter with one another and reflect on playing a "Chinese princess" and a "bearded lady" and Dick Smothers asks Tom "What's in between?" and Tom jokes "a camel". In another episode, a cast member (Paulsen) quips that he is ineligible to run for president because he has a viable solution for the civil rights problem, followed by the grand finale revue which includes comic situations surrounding various types of iconic hats. One of them includes a man in a Ku Klux Klan hood ducking for cover from a watermelon. Here, the tension between explicit and implicit racial discourse is apparent and possibly a way to explain how a show can be both racially progressive (within the black-white binary) and continuously draw from the racist ideology it attempts to subvert, through other non-white groups, typically employing hegemonic examples of racial performance to, in a sense, split racist ideology from itself and to both maintain the attachment to and contempt for non-white groups while producing some genuinely transgressive discourses of race within black-white

boundaries and political satire and a commitment to protesting the Vietnam War, which caused societal consensus that the show was controversial and probably for that reason, extremely popular.

The Carol Burnett Show (1960s and 1970s) does, by and large, approach transgressive messages regarding gender (not necessarily with intersectional implications) and the changing roles of women, particularly in regard to conventions regarding marriage and sexuality. As somewhat of a complement, *Saturday Night Live* in the 1970s does also contain some attempts to address these changing gender roles, at times successfully using parody or satire to challenge traditional gender roles and in other cases to reinforce them – ideal types of women are encapsulated in the roles/characterizations of the three female cast members, Jane Curtin is the white, hegemonic female, Gilda Radner most used for physical comedic capacities and to portray "other" whites, like Jews, ambiguously defined white ethnics and children, and Lorraine Newman mainly, if not exclusively in sexualized roles (she is also the one that receives the smallest amount of screen time). Also in the 1970s, *The Richard Pryor Show* by and large, when addressing gender was discussed in the context of discourses and representations of violating the black-white social and sexual taboos through his widely publicized romantic entanglements with white women.

Furthermore, this trend also confirms itself when looking within categories of difference, especially in the case of defining the terms of race within transgression against racial ideology, like in the cases of shows that advance transgressive discourses

and representations of race, while ignoring or mocking non-white groups for whom, the assumption is, race and racism is not "as bad". Groups like Hispanics, Asians, particularly East Asians, Native Americans, and generally most non-white and non-black immigrant groups remain relatively absent, both in sketch comedy in general, and in shows that either contain racial discourse or attempt to practice "redemptive hegemony" (Kane 2011). When they are present, the usual outcome is to uncritically talk through race typically at the expense of the group, as a form of concretizing racial logic while attempting to elude it. The tendency, present not only in sketch comedy, to define race and racism only in the histories, stories, players, and legacies of a black-white racial ideology will be considered and discussed in the cultural arena we look to societally to give us a mercilessly honest look at our racial formations and hopefully to make us laugh at its truth. Not a novel observation, Stephen Steinberg,[13] as early as 1981, noted the insidious nature of the "ethnic myth" regarding immigrant success stories and the American Dream, and understandable, but ultimately short-sighted celebrations of the preservation of immigrant cultures supported by the rise and solidification of neoliberal discourse regarding race, racism, and immigration, and ultimately the attempt to proceed

[13] Ronald Takaki (1989 and 2000) was also a strong voice for the importance of adopting a comprehensive, comparative treatment of race, racism, and immigration in lieu of a narrow reckoning with race and racism in the United States via the black-white binary, however integral and defining it may have been. Takaki (2000) advanced cross-racial and comparative analyses and a repositioning of the black-white binary to a wider discussion of how power vis-à-vis race ideology shapes the social reality of all groups involved with attention paid to the intersecting and nuanced ways it negotiates through racial identities, positions, methods of inequality, and the types of stories and representations we construct as a result.

with a fuller, messier, complicated, and frank discussion of the racial history of the United States. And how the real underlying reason for the media's troubling fascination with Chappelle's sudden departure, focusing on his "breakdown" or, on the other side of the aisle, how his departure was yet another example of how the hostile environment of still white-dominated media warps and thwarts blacks in the media was less about either of these extremes. There is certainly a relationship between media and cultural controversy and transgressive discourses and representation of race, which both *Chappelle's Show* and *The Richard Pryor Show* as examples of the most controversial and transgressive shows regarding race and racism over time, evidence. Yet, other controversial shows like *In Living Color* or *Da Ali G Show* also considered in the sample as controversial generally produced discourses and representations of race containing high levels of ambivalence toward race and racism – at times producing transgressive portraits and perspectives and at times reproducing hegemonic representations and discourses uncritically. By and large, *The Richard Pryor Show* was the most transgressive in terms of treatment of racial subject matters and was more successful at avoiding performances that were humorous but without problematic echoes of minstrelsy (which at times was the case with Garrett Morris and SNL). A prime example of this was preceding a sketch set somewhere in Africa, where Pryor plays an African tour guide to Americans, showcasing a performance by African dancers. The effect was to first celebrate cultural elements that helped to decenter the potential for a unilateral portrayal or commodification. Another example involves the differences in style, content and form of representation of East Asian cultures and mannerisms. A recurring character on *Saturday*

Night Live in 1977, played by John Belushi, is a samurai that poses as either an owner of a dry cleaner, a psychiatrist and so on who dressed in full kimono, mumbles "Japanese" phrases and uses chicanery to wriggle himself out of various situations. To be fair, Belushi's performance is great, the series *are* funny. Of the white male cast members of the 3rd season of *Saturday Night Live* (1977), John Belushi was used and promoted as the white, alpha male character – dominant, hyper-masculine, the rebel who was frequently pictured smoking and drinking, and aggressive, when compared to Bill Murray and Dan Akroyd. The sole non-white and black cast member, Garrett Morris, while given a respectable amount of screen time was almost always used as the tinder to Belushi's punchline or the resolution of conflict in the narrative. Morris often asks questions the most, or is the butt of the joke, so to speak, nearly exclusively when compared to the other beta male characters Murray and Akroyd. Even in episodes that concentrate on racial topics, such as the one Ray Charles hosted (discussed in the next chapter), this pattern between Morris and Belushi does not shift. There is also a high relationship between the amount of skin exposed and Morris's screen presence, with the exception of one sketch, Morris is the only male character to appear in sketches bare-chested. Morris is also the male cast member to appear in drag the most frequently and often in situations that are gratuitous, meaning the plot did not require this to be funny.

But Pryor also has a sketch in which he vanquishes many samurai foes, using similar elements of the typecasting of Japanese culture, saving the typical female character in distress taking place in a traditional Japanese tea garden, all dressed in black

kimono-style costumes. One major difference is resisting the urge to use racial performance, since mimicry, as a humorous technique, almost taunts the comic to mock and deride uncritically, and all of the East Asian characters are played by East Asian actors (Asian actors appeared on *The Richard Pryor Show* 25.6% of the time, compared to an average of 11% across the sample)[14] and by the end of the sketch, we learn that Richard Pryor is still Richard Pryor, as he exits he says in his own voice and style (no racial performance, or attempting to "try on" an "Asian" accent) to the grateful female by coolly leaving her saying, "How'd you like that mama?"

And like any attempt at charging at a goliath, *Chappelle's Show* reproduced hegemonic discourses and representations of gender and sexuality, risky reproductions of particular images of blackness clearly still too sensitive to freely laugh at, and experiencing the inability to transcend the trappings of racial ideology, the attempt was still memorable. More often than not, racial discourse in *Chappelle's Show* centered on the comic's desire to talk about race, to have a conversation, and how much he "trusted" his audience, despite the warning calls of precedent, he expressed, enacted, mocked,

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[14] The range of percentages of Asians in sketch comedy shows from the 1960s to the 2000s is from 0% (*The Carol Burnett Show* and *The Flip Wilson Show*) to the highest rate 39.3% in *Chappelle's Show*. Out of the sample of controversial shows – *The Smothers Brothers Show* (1960s), *The Richard Pryor Show* (1970s), *In Living Color* (1990s), and in the 2000s*, Chappelle's Show* (2003) and *Da Ali G Show* (2003) – the highest rate of visibility of Asian characters, stories, and representations are shows that are also "black" shows, or "shows about race". The other controversial shows, *The Smothers Brothers Show* included Asian actors and characters 5.5% of the time and nearly similarly, *Da Ali G* at 6.7% of the time. *Kids in the Hall* and *Saturday Night Live*, across decades, also displayed similar patterns in terms of proportion, representing Asians 0.9% and 1.4% of the time, respectively.

criticized, and sympathized with a down-to-earth, compassionate hope for racial accord. Out of the only sketches and shows that concentrated on transgressive perspectives for Native Americans, *The Richard Pryor Show* (1977), Chris Rock on *Saturday Night Live* (1990), and *Chappelle's Show* (2003), not surprisingly also sketches from black comics, *Chappelle's Show* was the only show to actively attempt to construct a presentation and contention with race in the United States but a deeper, more complete one. Some sketches may talk about cross-racial interactions, or mock behaviors of the dominant group, or present powerful, empathetic, and relevant alternate images and stories for members belonging to a similar social condition, but sketches in *Chappelle's Show* including his usual monologues and commentary throughout, endeavored to move beyond that line, to investigate the best steps forward. As was alluded to in the statistically significant relationship between racial proportion of characters and the existence of racial discourse though, the "formula" of *Chappelle's Show* as understood through the neoliberal, post-racial, "racism without racists", contemporary lens, was sorely misunderstood (Bonilla-Silva 2003). *Mind of Mencia* imitated much of *Chappelle's Show's* brand of "in your face" sketches on race, racism, and interactions between races, but ultimately tanked, because what made *Chappelle's Show* the best-selling DVD of all time during 2004, just a year after the debut of the show in 2003 (TV Geek Army 2013) and so wildly popular during syndication was both its secret ingredient and its worst foe – a bare look at the current state of racial relations, warts and all, and through the permissive cultural lens of comedy, hope to create dialogue with the intention to change. And so an examination of transgression is always an implicit (and here explicit) examination of hegemonic power,

with a critical eye, but one balanced by attempts to read these comedic texts on race through multiple and, to an extent limitless, intersecting planes of socially constructed difference. Truly, understanding the logic of hegemony through the illogic of comedy reveals fresh and intriguing insights into racial formation, already demonstrated with command during the creation of the nation and its inextricable relationship to racial supremacy, a black-white binary that worked to both control and cultivate new grounds of inequality and difference, and inevitably resulted in the first truly American cultural creation and sensation rooted in a comedic context – the minstrel show (Rourke [1931] 2004 and Lott [1993] 2013).

CHAPTER 4

TRANSGRESSIVE DISCOURSES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE

This chapter addresses the unique ways that transgressive racial discourses and representations achieve interpretative clarity in an array of sketches that are primarily concentrated in the decade of 1970s. In her book, *The Odd One In: On Comedy*, Alenka Zupancic (2008) explains that comedy is the material expression of the Hegelian spirit (Geist), perfectly liminal, open, and subjective, and superior to its ponderous sibling tragedy which maintains the fundamental relationship between the subject and the representation of the subject (the character). Zupancic quotes Hegel regarding what comes with the comic consciousness "all divine being returns, or it is the complete alienation of substance" (28). Rather than alienation of substance from the self or the subject, the substance is alienated from itself. Now, the substance is subject, and through its alienation the promise of consciousness can be realized. The temporal contributions of this move ensure a concrete realization of the spirit: "The universal that does not go through this process is not a true universal, but a mere general abstraction from the concrete. It is only with the concrete that we come to the real spirit of the universal, and we could say that the materialism of comedy is precisely the materialism of the spirit" (38). Comedy's influence on American society is hard to deny with the historical popularity of minstrel shows following the abolition of slavery that served to justify and maintain white supremacy to the popularity of contemporary comedy television shows. The exact function of comedy is ever-shifting, hard to pin down and explain, and can

draw on invisible psychological archetypes and drives, making intent and interpretation even more elusive.

Mikhail Bakhtin ([1968] 1984) examines in particular the liberatory nature of folk humor, most notably the transformative power of laughter experienced at socially mandated carnivals. The carnivalesque is characterized by a break from the official, ordered social world and during "carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part" (7). The conduit through which such a temporal transformation could occur is laughter: "Laughter proves the existence of clear spiritual vision and bestows it. Awareness of the comic and reason are the two attributes of human nature. Truth reveals itself with a smile when man abides in a nonanxious, joyful, comic mood" (141).

Considering dominating socio-cultural structures, such as race, of representations and discourses potentially tempers the purported power of comedy to transform. Stuart Hall (1989) and bell hooks (1992) expertly demonstrate the production of identity within, not outside of representation, via popular culture images and narratives that, in the similar capacity as its historical predecessor the minstrel show, that affirms racial hierarchy and racist logic. The construction of identity within representation, despite the negative outcomes, also means that identity is not predetermined, static, or as subject to existing socio-cultural norms. The cultural form of comedy, as conceptualized by Hegel and Zupancic, is theoretically primed to exploit this connection between representation and

identity, as its very constitution means the retreat of the substance; where the self is liberated from construction from the substance and liberated.

This chapter discusses the results from a content analysis of popular sketch comedy shows from the 1960s to the 2000s (N=1,120 sketches) that focus on the possibilities of transgressive discourses and representations of race. While overall, sketch comedy shows did not produce transgressive discourses and representations of race instances of successfully transgressive discourses and representations of race that challenged racial ideology remain integrally relevant. In its classic formulation (Gramsci [1971] 2012), the very label of hegemonic cultural meaning suggests an absence of direct, coercive force and a widely accepted, thus invisible, application of meanings, norms, attitudes, styles, and values. By definition, any departure from dominant interpretations, whether successfully oppositional or not, indicates a challenge to hegemonic stability, without clearly illustrating a change in cultural meaning (Gamson et al. 1992). While substantive change in either structural or cultural meanings is still important, the landscape of the challenges to disrupting hegemonic meanings and representations is equally important. Without the understanding of these foundational movements, a complete portrayal of the works of hegemony and ways to create alternate spaces of socio-cultural existence will remain illusory.

Thus, the unique ways that transgressive racial discourses and representations achieve interpretative clarity in an array of sketches is considered. The potential for ambivalence is always an unfortunate side effect of using the comedic context for the purposes of effective challenges to racist ideology, since the very characteristic of

comedic discourses – multivocality (heteroglossia) and resistance to singular (often hegemonic) readings – which make such challenges permissible, is also difficult to resolve. Part of the success of the sketches and the recurrent ways in which they achieve rhetorical clarity discussed herein is to use discursive and representational techniques and strategies that promote an alternate interpretation. They work to rearticulate the tenets of racial hegemony by entering the ever-shifting boundaries of interpretation inherent in the comedic form. They do not simply laugh at the madness created by living in society that actively polices normative boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, and class. They work to remake meanings, disrupt controlling images, and to achieve a closure of interpretation, one that resists and defies the limiting, stereotypical, and negative dominant interpretations, while providing memorable instances of gallows humor. Far more sketches from the 1960s to the 2000s were discussed in the preceding chapters and were discussed in light of their contributions to affirming racial hegemony, and their unrealized attempts to achieve racial transgression, either resulting in the reinforcement of racial hegemony or ambivalence in interpretation. Thus, the transgressive sketches below represent examples that fully contend with and remake racial discourses or representations. As evidenced in the analysis of other sketches, an intersectional lens typically reveals other areas of transgression, in the face of either ambivalent attitudes toward race, or racist discourses and representations. Similarly, many of the sketches discussed herein reproduce or ignore various spheres of negative and stereotypical discourses and representations of gender and sexuality. The analysis and discussion will follow a similar format to previous chapters, with a brief discussion of the occurrence of

transgressive sketches considering various points of comparison, followed by an interpretative analysis. Unlike the other chapters though, excerpts from audience reception research on two sketches from *Chappelle's Show*, conducted in 2008, will also be analyzed and discussed. Despite the small sample size of that preliminary research, the emergent narrative trends provide a useful complement to the interpretative analysis in general and in particular to two sketches that are transgressive (*Blind Supremacy*) and transgressive-ambivalent (*The Mad Real World*).

Overview of Results

Transgressive racial discourses and representations are not a common occurrence. Out of the total number of sketches (N=1,120), 50 sketches, or 4.5% of them were successful in launching challenges to racial hegemony. Table 9 shows the percentages of transgressive sketches over time by the most controversial shows which determined the sampling method. The following abbreviations are used for each show: "Pryor" for *The Richard Pryor Show* (1970s), "Da Ali G" for *Da Ali G Show* (2000s), "Chappelle" for *Chappelle's Show* (2000s), "SB" for *The Smother's Brothers Show* (1960s), and "Living Color" for *In Living Color* (1990s). The table is arranged in descending order from most transgressive show to least transgressive show. The percentages of each show's total amount of sketches across the sample is also presented to illustrate the proportion of the show's material in the entire sample.

Table 9. *Transgressive Sketches Of Discourses And Representations Of Race By Controversial Shows*

	Controversial Show				
Transgressive	Chappelle	Pryor	DAG	SB	Living Color
	36% (18)	32% (16)	24% (12)	4% (2)	4% (2)
Total Sketches	10.4% (117)	3.6% (40)	4% (45)	8.1% (91)	8.1% (91)

N=1,120 Sketches
Source: 2014 Humor Dissertation Dataset

Weaver's (2011) delineation of successful reverse discourse strategies, which work to resolve ambiguity in interpretation and achieve a firmer closure of meaning was one of the major guiding principles by which sketches were deemed transgressive or not. In addition, sketches that created alternate representations (typically addressing the semiotic) that departed from racist ideology, whether or not they employed discursive strategies were also included. Lastly, sketches that rearticulated hegemonic narratives, situations, and readings concerning racial ideology were also an important plane of consideration. Transgressive sketches were grouped into three thematic groups: reinterpretation; commentary and everyday situations. 35.1% of transgressive sketches used reinterpretation, 59.4% commentary, and 5.5% everyday situations. Generally, sketches in the reinterpretation category used hegemonic (familiar) situations, memories,

narratives, and identities as a method of entrée into the critique, questioning, destabilizing, and at the most effective times, subverting racist logic. Transgressive sketches that fell under the *reinterpretation* category used hegemonic (familiar) situations, memories, narratives, and identities as a method of entrée into the critique, questioning, destabilizing, and, at the most effective times, subverting racist logic. These sketches frequently contended with intense symbols of racism such as chattel slavery and the Ku Klux Klan or adopted some classic American symbols, such as the cowboy, reinterpreting them in a fashion that destabilizes our commonsense understanding of the shape and form of the symbols. The most common thematic category of all transgressive sketches was the manipulation of the humorous format to deliver clear and direct anti-racist statements and *commentary* that challenge and attack the interpretation of popular symbols, realities and characterizations. These sketches take advantage of the permeability of humorous discourses to tolerate secondary discourses that in serious contexts would be immediately rebuffed. This is to say that examples of such clear objections to and criticisms of racial hierarchy and ideology have an easier time to slip in, seemingly unnoticed. What would immediately be considered a charged and aggressive verbal attack, through the comedic infrastructure, becomes palpable without losing rhetorical integrity. Also used in transgressive sketches are the parody of *everyday situations* to discuss and contend with race and racism. Examples of real life situations that are parodied are a "Back to Africa" tour wherein American blacks and whites participate with various expectations of discovery of their roots and an insider's view of how customs officers are trained at airports. These sketches are different than those that

use *reinterpretation*, primarily because they are rooted in creating grounded, situational stories that mimic everyday experiences. While not as necessarily powerful as sketches that utilize *reinterpretation* and *commentary*, since these techniques necessitate a form of re-writing history and clear verbal assaults on racist logic and hegemony, these sketches typically enact a "behind-the-scenes" tactic that allows the viewer to see it how "really is".

Reinterpretation

Two sketches stand out in particular that directly challenge white supremacy and the proliferation of racial stereotypes. In the first, Chappelle plays Clayton Bigsby, a blind, black, white supremacist who has become the cornerstone of the contemporary white power movement through his widely read and regarded novels – *Dumptruck, Nigger Stain, I Smell Nigger,* and *Niggerbook* – having sold over 600,000 copies. Bigsby, blind and raised "white" does not know he is black, nor do his adoring fans. The sketch parodies the tone, cinematography and format of *Frontline*, broadcast on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and is reported by Kent Wallace, a distinguished white investigative reporter who is reminiscent of hallmark anchormen such as Walter Cronkite and Tom Brokaw. Chappelle purposely targets this format since the program prides itself in hard-hitting documentaries mainly on provocative and controversial subject matter. The PBS website of *Frontline* advertises it as

> never [shying] away from tough, controversial issues or complex stories. In an age of anchor celebrities and snappy sound bites, *Frontline* remains committed to providing a primetime venue for engaging documentaries

> that fully explore and illuminate the critical issues of our times. (Public Broadcasting Service 2007)

Just in choosing his format, he has succeeded in providing his audience with a familiar visual context and introducing the oft painful history of white supremacy and racism using a doubly comedic and serious tone. Chappelle inherently challenges his viewers to question *Frontline's* mission statement and taking its meaning literally, he suggests racism and America's history and persistent current reality of oppressing blacks should be the next tough, controversial and complex story that is told. To add to visceral thought-provoking material, Chappelle creates Charles Bigsby – the blind black white supremacist – who is performed by him quite convincingly. His physical appearance is altered so that his eyes are consistently half open; he dresses in flannel, jean overalls and a baseball cap while carrying a cane. The segment includes one-on-one interviews between Bigsby and the reporter and follows him as he prepares for his first public speaking appearance. A fellow white supremacist explains to the reporter that Bigsby has never left his secluded ranch and that his true racial identity has been masked so not to impinge on "the movement". While the characters within the skit, besides the reporter and his white supremacist friend, did not know Bigsby's real race, the audience sees and knows Chappelle is playing this character and that Chappelle is Black. Hearing the disturbingly hateful and arguably anachronistic racial slurs come from his mouth serve to debunk their meaning and make vulnerable those that continue to espouse those beliefs. An excerpt from one of Bigsby's many racist rants to Wallace goes as follows:

Wallace: You've written four books now?

Bigsby: I've written six books, they've published four.

W: What would you say is the general theme of them?

B: Sir, my message is simple: Niggers, Jews, homos, Mexicans, and all kinds of different Chinks stink and I hate them!

W: You refer to N-, uh, I mean African Americans, what exactly is your problem with them?

B: How much time you got, buddy? Where would I start? Well, first of all they're lazy, good-for-nothing tricksters, crack smoking swindlers, big butt having, wide-nosed breathing up all the white man's air (change of scene from Bigsby's front porch, to them walking across a bridge on his property), they eat up all the chickens, think they're the best dancers, and they stink! Did I mention that?

W: Yes, I believe you did.

B: Matter of fact, my friend Jasper told me one of them coons came by his house to pick his sister up for a date. He said, "Look here, nigger, that there is my girl. If anyone is going to have sex with my sister, it's going to be me!"

W: You've never left this property have you?

B: No, not in many years.

W: What if I were to tell you, you were an African American?

B: Sir! I am going to make this clear. I am in no way, shape, or form involved in any niggerdom! You understand? Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a book reading to go to. Why don't you bring your media cameras over there if you wanna see some truth!

Chappelle assumes the persona of the most extreme incarnation of white racism but remains black, drawing from the DuBoisian ([1903] 1986) double consciousness, but speaking as both a white person in spirit and as a black person in flesh. That is, Chappelle

understands what white supremacists *think* of blacks and how they are represented, and what he as a black comedian *thinks* of white supremacists; his conscious site of resistance is shifted from spectator to actively voicing this critique using comedic techniques like parody and satire to create temporary sites of resistance. The effects of not only his entry into white hegemonic spaces, but his literal adoption of the style, voice, stance, opinions, and lifestyle, destabilize their power, indeed they are ludicrous, beyond offensive or racist – through his comedic intervention, they are impossible and illogical.

Once at the KKK meeting, Bigsby delivers this speech:

> Bigsby: Everybody, I have a lot of thangs to discuss, mainly niggers. America is at war with Al Qaeda, but we're still losing the war against Al Sharpton. (Wallace with voice-over commentary: The Asian community was a target as well.) Let's talk about Chinese people, with their Kung Fu and that Ching-Chang-Chang talk, I can't understand you! Go back to your country! White power! Don't let the liberal media tell you how to think and feel, if you have hate in your heart, then let it out. If you don't like Will and Grace, it doesn't mean there's something wrong with you, there's something wrong with Will. He's homosexual. White power! Colin Powell…Connalingus Rice! Connalingus Rice sounds like a Mexican dish, maybe we should put her on a plate and send her to the Mexicans, so the Mexicans can eat her! White power. (The crowd chants "White Power!") Just open up your heart and let that hate out! (Neal Brennan as a spectator begins shouting: "Show us your face! Clayton, we want to see your face! The crowd cheers: Yeah!").

At this crescendo moment when he removes his KKK hood in a room full of white supremacists, female spectators vomit as they cling to their male counterparts for protection, and male spectators display feelings of disgust and aggression. One male spectator, so shocked at this uncovering, dies after his head explodes. Chappelle chooses *the* oppressive white racist's narrative, adopts it, and manipulates it via a comedic format;

he enters a dialogic context to confront an oppressive and dominating narrative with no possibility of multiple meanings, and exits with a radical and forcefully derisive portrayal of racial hatred and oppression.

The Richard Pryor Show, more than three decades before *Chappelle's Show*, was the most consistently transgressive sketch comedy show. Perhaps for this reason, the show was also extremely short lived – NBC canceled the popular and controversial show after only four episodes. Techniques Chappelle used in his show to challenge and mock hegemonic stances, narratives and identities through *reinterpretation* was present in more than half of the sketches (56.2%) on the *Pryor* show, both demonstrating the well-documented influence of Pryor on Chappelle and the immutability of particular humorous contexts, themes and devices to achieve transgressive discourses and representations. Pryor frequently chose racist tropes and situations which he then satirizes, destabilizing their hold on meaning and, at his most effective, complete obliteration and creation of alternate interpretations.

In a sketch set in the South in 1926, a black man stands accused of raping a white woman defended by a white lawyer (played by Robin Williams), who is a Northerner. Richard Pryor plays the Southern white prosecutor, in racial performance, without any change to his skin tone, but wearing a silver-haired wig and mustache and clothing evocative of Colonel Sanders. The courtroom galley is divided between "black" and "white" sides and the jury is comprised of all white males. Even when presented with evidence that the black male was in jail at the time of the alleged rape, the prosecutor persists, until a white male in the galley admits that he was with the woman on the night

in question. Several other white males begin admitting their involvement with her; even the prosecutor intimates having a sexual relationship with her. The jury has no choice but to find the accused male not guilty, but turns their attention to his "Jew lawyer" as guilty for succeeding in getting him off. One of the jurors cries "this carpet-bagging, communist Jew boy lawyer is guilty of getting him off!" The crowd (both black and white) rallies together, demanding his hanging and the sketch comes to a close as the judge walks toward the Northern prosecutor carrying a noose.

Several themes from the Jim Crow era of racism are familiar – the irrational fear of black male sexuality and the related need to protect white female sexuality and femininity from their "dangerous" presence, the tension between Northerners and Southerners, segregation of public spaces into "black" and "white", and a justice system that reverses the primacy of a defendant's innocence. Pryor maneuvers through this well-known narrative and history and makes several key choices: 1) to assume a hegemonic voice and positionality; 2) changes history, so to speak, by ensuring the accused black male's vindication; 3) still acknowledges the enduring power of white supremacy; and 4) broadens the black/white binary of race and racism in the United States by highlighting one of the many other spheres of inequality and oppression. Akin to Chappelle's Clayton Bigsby, Pryor manipulates racist discourses and logic and destabilizes their salience by creating the comic incongruity of seeing a black male as a white male. He directly assumes the voice of dominant and single-voiced positions and through satire and parody, weakens their relevance and coherence, and ultimately dismantles their integrity. But Pryor does not stop here; straightforward reversal of a so-called long gone past is not

sufficient. In fact, the concluding scene of the approaching hanging of the prosecutor ensures satirical purpose is not obscured – the ideology of race, conceptualized by Omi and Winant (1994), is an adaptable and malleable construct that conforms to maintain and justify hierarchical systems of domination. Pryor asserts, through comic devices, what Omi and Winant argue convincingly: Jim Crow racism is but one manifestation and it would be a grave mistake to consider race and racism as problems solved by the Civil Rights Movement and the abolition of slavery.

Contending with the legacy of white supremacy is also explored in a sketch depicting an expedition to Egypt that uncovers great treasures in a tomb. Unlike the previous two sketches discussed though, this sketch features a protagonist that does not assume the positionality of a racist, white male, but instead explores the effects and consequences of white supremacy from the standpoint of the subaltern. The explorers, three white males and one black male (played by Pryor), search and observe the relics in reverence and awe. One of them gleefully holds an elixir of life granting immortality, but stumbles and accidentally pours out its contents with comedic flourish. Off alone, Pryor's attention is caught by an enormous book that reads "The Book of Life" as he brushes off thick layers of cobwebs and dust. His eyes widen as he reads aloud a radically altered ontology of the origins of humankind – god is black, as are the original people on the planet, major cultural contributions like music, art, and language have black roots, and is surprised at the absence of anything concerning whites and whiteness. Meanwhile, the leader of the expedition, hearing and observing Pryor, becomes alarmed and silently motions to the two other white explorers toward the tomb's exit. They proceed to seal the

tomb, locking the unknowing black explorer to presumably die with knowledge of the truth of the world. In this sketch, unlike the one recently discussed, Pryor does not assume the voice and positionality of the hegemonic white male, instead he maintains a subordinated representation that serves to project an alternate reality that revolutionizes this black male's conception of the world and of his own worth. The objective is to eradicate white supremacy, not only undermine, but to raze it to the ground. Electing to remain in a subordinated position also brings a somber tone to the surrounding antics and this contrast further strengthens the gravity of the emotional impact of such a discovery for this character – he belongs, in the most intimate and original way, to this world and to a society that consistently questions, discredits, and withholds what is his primordial birthright. His entrapment in the tomb with the evidence to permanently disable a racially hierarchical system though represents again the power of this system and is a poignant reminder of the tragic difference between the "what should be" and the "what is" of our societal existence.

In a series of sketches that span several episodes, Pryor plays a gunslinger cowboy in a setting evocative of the "Wild West" portrayed in so many of the beloved Westerns that are integral to American social, historical and cultural consciousness. In these sketches, Pryor's cowboy is not limited to the role of the *black* cowboy, although his difference is still noted with an outsider status. Furthermore, these sketches contain no racial discourse, an uncommon occurrence in the rest of his sketches, but make important contributions to reinterpreting the boundaries regarding how classic American, so important they are revered, images and symbols are raced. The cowboy, a symbol of

strength, resilience, hard work, and fearlessness, is the epitome of masculinity in American society. In our national birth story, the cowboy explored and built the country we know and enjoy today, battling dangerous terrain and dangerous foes. With their weathered faces and no frills frontier lifestyle, the cowboy continues to propagate our mythic national identity as independent doers, shrugging off the benefits of strong government intervention and oversight. The cowboy does not complain, does not look for handouts, and is the master of his own future. Coupled with these virtuous qualities is the sort of noble violence that is also integral to the cowboy symbol through the defense of their honor, sometimes at the slightest of offenses, through gunfights. A continuation of the tradition of dueling as a means to solve conflicts and to affirm masculinity, the Western gunfight served to maintain systems of power and order in still developing frontier towns and to establish the terms of defining masculinity in a developing nation. For a national symbol though, the cowboy is constructed in clearly specific gender lines, in addition to sexuality and racial demarcations. The cowboy is not only hyper-masculine, but hyper-heterosexual and white. In *Buffalo Soldiers in the West: A Black soldiers Anthology* and *Black Cowboys of Texas* (2000), editors Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael N. Searles (2007) and editor Sara R. Massey (2000) demonstrate the pervasive presence of black cowboys and the related successful efforts to stultify their existence and significance.

While the transgressive sketches in the *Pryor Show* do not explicitly include racial discourse or any forms of critique as was demonstrated in the other sketches contained within this categorical distinction, he has no reason to due to the enormity of the

reinterpretation of meaning that is already established by representing a black male as a cowboy, not a cowboy who happens to be black. In two separate sketches, Pryor reinterprets and therefore challenges the strict racial boundaries that surround the cowboy symbol, without the use of discursive techniques. In fact, in the first example, Pryor's character is defeated by three white cowboys in an altercation that leads to his death. In the sketch, a lone gunslinger (Pryor) approaches an American Western town as three white cowboys/gunslingers heckle him from a porch, calling him "gringo" and asking him how his "ass" is. Pryor's angrily asks whether they mean his donkey. The three white gunslingers answer the black gunslinger's insolence with heavy pistol fire while the lone gunslinger struggles to remove his pistol, seeming to be glued to his holster. The three white gunslingers jeer:

> White males: Hey gringo, how's your ass?
>
> Gunslinger (Pryor): You mean my donkey? It wasn't nice to kill my donkey.

Receiving gunfire enough to a kill a single man many times over, the black gunslinger falls to the ground impossibly slowly, until eventually falling dead. In the second gunslinger sketch, three gunslingers (Pryor and two white males) also on a porch compete with one another over superiority of skills with their pistols. Pryor's black gunslinger challenges a fellow white gunslinger to "prove it". The white gunslinger answers his challenge by expertly shooting two glass bottles on the ledge of a porch. He turns to Pryor's character with a proud smile to which Pryor's character motions "so-so" with his hand. Another white cowboy stumbles out of a saloon and surprised by gunfire from the

black gunslinger who methodically shoots at another white gunslinger rushes drunkenly back through the swinging saloon doors. The remaining gunslinger needing to "prove it" walks to face the two gunslingers, who have already proven themselves, lifts his hat and shoots himself in the stomach. The black and white gunslinger look at each other with expressions of confusion and disbelief and slowly back away still facing the gunslinger dying from a self-inflicted stomach wound. The significance of both of these sketches is not whether the black gunslinger died or stayed alive, or whether he overcomes insurmountable obstacles due to his marginalization, or even whether he uses yet another space clearly defined in racial terms to critique these limitations. The reinterpretation in these examples are more subtle and quite clever. Clearly, the situations are comedic and Pryor's expressive face and bodily contortions make both sketches incredibly funny, even in the one that he dies. Yet, the overall feel and plot of both of these sketches closely mimicked many scenes from Western movies and other popular memories of the Wild West era and could have easily been dramatic, climactic, and crucial scenes. All of these factors serve to decenter a deeply ingrained, treasured hallmark of American masculinity and whiteness vis-à-vis the cowboy/gunslinger symbol by including in these past narratives and memories an alternate representation of the gunslinger. Neither of these sketches reference the blackness of Pryor's character – in the first sketch, the hecklers invoke "gringo", to mark this stranger gunslinger as an outsider, but not due to his race. In fact, the white gunslingers adopt a term developed by indigenous populations as acts of resistance, making the comic irony and incongruity of the situation that much more layered. Unlike the paragon of family values, principles, and goodness that *The Cosby*

Show projects or the representations of blacks in the 1950s as servants, deadbeats, or criminals, these sketches offer us a third way. Pryor's black gunslinger is both courageous and flawed, masculine and goofy, and an outsider and an insider. In other words, Pryor's black gunslinger is not immediately *raced* or made a derivative of "real" white cowboys and gunslingers, his presence, through the rearticulation of representation, creates an alternate understanding of the range of images and identities black males have access to. In this case, there is no discursive mandate for challenging the racial and cultural hegemony of this symbol – through representational and narrative choices, Pryor succeeds in expanding the boundaries of what a cowboy looks and sounds like while simultaneously changing what it means to be a black male. In his Wild West, black males are just as viable as cowboys and gunslingers, just as normal and obvious. As described by Frantz Fanon's ([1952] 2008) achingly beautiful wish in *Black Skins, White Masks*:

> Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from my self, and gave myself up as an object. What did this mean to me? Peeling, stripping my skin, causing a hemorrhage that left congealed black blood all over my body. Yet this reconsideration of myself, this thematization, was not my idea. *I wanted quite simply to be a man among man. I would have liked to enter our world young and sleek, a world we could build together*. (92, emphasis added)

What Pryor achieves is much more than comedy of watching reversals of the cowboy/gunslinger symbols, he successfully creates a temporal world in which the possibility of a black man to be a man is realized.

Commentary

Chappelle does not make use of a dialogic context by directly entering it, but rather forces heteroglossia by adding to single-voiced discourse retrospectively. He plays clips from his guest appearance on a show titled, "Angry White Men", hosted by Donohue, stopping at various points to say what he was unable and unwilling to say at the time. Initially, he explains, that he was extremely interested to engage in dialogue about race in the United States, but that he "gave up" in the middle of the show since it becomes "the same person saying the same thing over and over again, instead of it being a conversation, which is why I agreed to go in the first place." Now, Chappelle brings his side of the conversation in a context that allows for multivocality, something impossible in the "serious" world. On the Donohue show, Chappelle does not engage with a white male audience member who expresses:

> White male: I think one of the underlying issues here is that affirmative action forces somebody, you're forcing people, and anytime you force somebody, I don't know about you gentlemen, but I don't like to be forced. When I'm pushed, I'm only pushed so far, and then I push back.

The clip pauses and Chappelle delivers the response he would have said:

> Chappelle: Forced? Oh, you mean like slavery forced? Remember that thing when you forced us to work for you, for 100, what do you think black people were like, "No problem boss (in a stereotypical black southern accent), I'd love to! Man, that was infuriating…

Both here and in the Bigsby sketch, Chappelle challenges the dominant, white (male), both de jure racist and colorblind racist perspectives by entering that world, but he leaves that world altered, fragmented, and discontinuous. In a sense, he reopens the "arbitrary

and contingent" moment of identity formation as described by Hall back to the potential for rearticulation through the Derridean deferral of meaning. Four potential identities exist simultaneously through Chappelle's commentary – the Chappelle on the Donohue show who is silent, passive-aggressive, and defeated; the Chappelle who is assertive, ironic, somber and incredulous; the white male asserting his frustrations with, to him, an anachronistic need for racial equality who feels his white privilege threatened by the "others"; and the white male, after Chappelle's criticisms, who both naively and callously, forgets with convenience the altered meaning of something as seemingly objective as the word "forced". The visual representations in which identities are forming against are doubled, as we ingest both simultaneously, the reexamination and thus contention with an adamant closure of meaning is temporarily weakened.

Interjecting commentary and adding a missing or subordinated voice is also carried out during Chappelle's expressed anger over the WB network's mascot, a dancing frog with a top hat and cane. Part of another sketch is which he parodies the extreme lengths that reality TV shows can go to establish drama, Chappelle is seen dancing, mocking the style the network uses to advertise new shows or to continue interest in current shows in between commercials. After the last installment of the show "Zapped", the WB frog sits on Chappelle's shoulder, drawn to evoke the costuming of minstrels, and sings out "mammy" in an exaggerated way, while lifting his top hat. After the sketch, Chappelle reacts to the audience's reaction of surprise and nervous laughter in response to his version of the WB frog and he replies:

> Chappelle: That fucking frog. I hate that frog. What?! I can't make fun of the frog? They don't do that shit on white networks, as soon as a black man, you have dum-dum-dum-dum (singing and taking his cap off) oh, the WB! I like chicken. The most racist shit ever. Welcome back niggers (in a mocking, singing voice) to the WB!

While this example is not as lengthy or substantively explored as Chappelle's commentary-after-the-fact on the Donohue show, this still represents a powerful and effective way of achieving transgression in already written racial discourse, in this case, racist representation and semiology. He voices a perspective that is utterly unobscured even though the interlude still remained very funny and critiques the way television, even its images and styling, is raced and racist. Both the Donohue and the WB critiques are also moments when Chappelle shows his anger and frustration. Fanon ([1952] 2008) again offers us an eloquent verbalization of the expected emotional outcomes of racism, colonization, and white supremacy:

> I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects…Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation without dye. I lose my temper, demand an explanation…Nothing doing. I explode. Here are the fragments put together by another me. (89)

And W.E.B. DuBois ([1940] 1986), in the opening paragraphs to his chapter on "The White World" in *Dusk of Dawn* his "autobiography of a concept of race," describes what it means for a black male to live in mid-20th century America:

> I was not an American; I was not a man; I was by long education and continual compulsion and daily reminder, a colored man in a white world; and that white world often existed primarily, so far as I was concerned, to see with sleepless vigilance that I was kept within bounds. All this made me limited in physical movement and provincial in thought and dream. I could not stir, I could not act, I could not live, without taking into careful daily account the reaction of my white environing world. How I traveled, where I ate, where I slept, with whom I talked, where I sought recreation, where I studied, what I wrote and what I could get published – all this depended and depended primarily upon an overwhelming mass of my fellow citizens in the United States, from whose society I was largely excluded. (653)

The themes of suffocation, existential trauma, and the anger and rage that are part and parcel of living in a society governed by an ontological hostility to blackness – whether in the United States or North Africa – are alluded to in Chappelle's anger and indignation.

In a series of sketches polling various people on a range of social issues on *The Smothers Brothers Show*, black comedian Scoey Mitchell also uses direct commentary to deliver searing critiques of racial hierarchy and racism. In one of them, he also interjects heteroglossia into newspaper want ads that he jokes are "comic strips" for him. His response to a poll the brothers are conducting regarding how the government is doing on the "War on Poverty", begins with a sarcastic retort: "They're going to take that from us too?" Reading from the want ads, he states how laughable he finds the promises of employers to be "equal opportunity" and how the job opportunities are not better "up North," as he resides in Alaska. Staring intensely into the camera, Mitchell removes a switchblade from his pocket and proceeds to remove an ad for a "shoe shine executive" and the sketch comes to a close. In another poll, the Smothers Brothers ask about the

quality of television and in this case, Mitchell delivers clearer commentary as he expresses his confusion and frustration at the dominant white presence on television, noting how if blacks are 10% of the population, then 1 out of every 10 main characters should be black. He continues his critique, moving away from the context of television and popular culture, while alluding to his $8 television set acquired under questionable circumstances by his cousin, he claims that if one of the Smothers Brothers were black, they (blacks) would get the "dumb one".

Another technique used by Chappelle to create a double-voiced effect is shown through two of his sketches, one in which the thoughts of various racial groups on a plane together and heard by the audience and the other he introduces a spokesman of sorts – a "singing, pretty white girl" – to voice his thoughts. He explains, "America is not ready to hear the things a young, black man has to say…the only way it would work is if a pretty, white girl were to say them." A pretty, white woman emerges from backstage and proceeds to operatically sing Chappelle's words that he writes down on index cards:

> Pretty white girl (PWG): Crack was invented and distributed to intentionally destroy the black community. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)
>
> PWG: AIDS was too. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)
>
> PWG: The police never looked for Tupac's and Biggie's murderers. Fuck the police. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)
>
> PWG: Whatever happened to that recount in Florida? (Chappelle hands her a new index card)
>
> PWG: OJ didn't do it. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: On second thought, yeah he did. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: Gay sex is gross. Sorry, I just find it to be gross. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: Unless of course they're lesbians. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: I like lesbians. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: I like lesbians. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

Chappelle: For real nigger, I like lesbians. But I digress from my point. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: All Chinese people look alike. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: So do white people. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: Pretty much anyone who isn't black looks alike to me. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: Oh, I want to stick my thumb in J. Lo's butt. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: I wouldn't mind sticking a finger or two in that singing white girl's butt either. (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: Call me on my cell 917…(she trails off, realizing Chappelle has written down his number for her and sheepishly folds the index card and places it in her bosom as Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: And now, it's time to collect ad revenue for Comedy Central! (Chappelle hands her a new index card)

PWG: Revenue they don't share with my black ass. (Chappelle and the singing, pretty white girl hold hands and bow)

In this introduction to the episode, Chappelle, like Pryor, contends with and manipulates the reality of the power and privilege of "who gets to speak". But here Chappelle employs a technique not employed by Pryor, which is to use the dominant to project his thoughts and voice, instead of using it as a point of entry for critique, or reversal. Unlike the style seen in the *Bigsby* sketch, Chappelle does not assume the speech, style, or consciousness of white supremacy, but contends with the subordination of the black male identity by playing along with the rules of racial hierarchy for his own means. The sanctity of authorial clarity is not obscured even though the author's (Chappelle) words are literally spoken by another person – here, the combination of an ironic identity (whose semantic mandate is to establish dialectic, according to Burke) with the silencing effects of racial hegemony work to dismantle a previously inaccessible sphere of social existence. In this sketch, Chappelle desires not to establish dialectic, but must enter a space forbidden to him using the techniques meant to establish multivocality, only then to take one monologic (and oppressive) context through the transitory dialectic between his words and his words spoken by someone with access to establish an alternate and remade form of monologic discourse. In this instance, Chappelle is both author and character, the latter role performed by the white female actor. Therefore, both the objectified discourse of a character is no longer at the whim of authorial understanding, since the speech centers and speech unities are one in the same. While Chappelle's Bigsby character, along with Pryor's character on the Egypt expedition and in his reinterpretation of *To Kill A Mockingbird* all capitalize on the strength of the parodic form – the second voice that is hostile to original discourse – this

technique does something unexpected with the parodic/comedic format. And indeed, Chappelle is not using parody in this sketch. He is though accessing the permeability of the humorous format and its polyphony – as in its use in phonetics – the transformation of racial discourses from a purportedly questionable source (young black males) to a form of discourse that is heard and legitimate. One of the reasons why this is "permissible" in the humorous context, without entirely being humorous, is the way in which Chappelle maintains a balance between social critique and comedy. The "serious" opening and closing lines bookend the sketch, while the material in the middle – about his love of lesbians, his sexual desire for Jennifer Lopez and his white singing companion, and mild reversals of racial stereotyping – keep the comedic encasing intact.

The ridicule and mocking of homosexuality is one point of simultaneous transgression and subordination present along a different axis of identity and inequality. While his jabs at OJ and the American political system are grounded in popular news stories, his blunt statement that "gay sex is gross" relies on superiority theories of comedy to reinforce a position of privilege and power (in this case, Chappelle's heterosexuality). The reinforcement of gender ideologies of objectification of women and the power of the male gaze are also present, as he notes with relish his deep feelings for lesbians and his sexual interludes regarding Jennifer Lopez and the pretty singing white girl. Sure, "gay sex is gross," but the masculine fantasy of sexual desire shared and displayed by two women for the sole purposes of their sexual arousal, is certainly far from "gross". This not only serves to express oppression along gender lines – women as objects at the pleasure of men – but also along sexuality lines as well where the

possibility of female desire (both for another female and the masculine absent) is impossible. Ultimately, understanding women, the female or feminine is an ontological fallacy because the Western sexist paradigm only allows for the female to exist in opposition to the ontologically existing male (Butler [1990] 2008). Operating within this context, it is no surprise that both of his sexual advances, one in the imaginary and the other real, involve desires and impulses to penetrate in a way that reaffirms his heterosexuality (anal penetration is copacetic if performed by a heterosexual male to a heterosexual female) and masculinity (in the story, the singing female is flattered and flushed at his sexual advances, placing the index card with his number on it in her bosom).

Apart from a reversal of racial stereotyping that is so mild it is nearly tongue-in-cheek, in which the practice of racial profiling and the unitary way blackness is considered in our society is challenged as he jokes that all Chinese and white people look alike. The discourses about the intersections between race, state corruption and complicity in racism, and economic inequalities common in a capitalist society remain powerful in intent – the decimation of the early, urban black community by drugs, one of the examples of the effects of a racist hierarchical society on health and disease, the bias of the law on who they protect and those they punish or ignore, and issues of racial inequality in areas of production and ownership in the entertainment industry. Without the comedic context (as we have explored above, Chappelle weaves in and out of serious and comedic contexts) buttressing these bold statements, Chappelle is entirely correct –

the same statements would land as radical, accusatory, dangerous and even paranoid – if delivered by a young, black male.

Critiques of stereotyping and the sad state of tolerance and acceptance in our "nation of immigrants" are also examined in a sketch that takes place on a plane and moves through various pairs of passengers whose thoughts we can hear: two men of unspecified Middle Eastern descent, not speaking in English, two black males, a white male and his teenaged daughter, two Native American males dressed in traditional headdress and garb, two buffaloes, and lastly Chappelle and co-creator of the show Neal Brennan. The thoughts unfold as follows:

> Two Middle Eastern men speak heatedly to one another in their native tongue. Their conversation is displayed in subtitles:
> First Man: The Americans have picked wrong once again as I knew they would.
>
> Second Man: Justin was the only choice in American Idol.
>
> Two black male passengers behind them:
>
> First Man: Man, of all the flights to be on, I gotta be on the one with those terrorist sons of bitches. I got my eye on you Al Qaeda!
>
> Behind them is a white male and his daughter:
> White Man: What are those Negroes doing in first class?! Must be rappers. I better keep an eye on Sara.
>
> Two Native American males sit behind the father and daughter and think:
>
> Older Native American Man: Me no trust the White man. We better not go to the bathroom. White man might steal my seat and call it Manifest Destiny.
>
> Two buffaloes behind them, in subtitles think:
> At least you Indians got casinos. You corn eating bastards.

Chappelle, holding a newspaper, and Brennan are in the last row, asleep and the sketch comes to a close by zooming in on the newspaper, *The Daily Truth*, with the front page headline: "America United".

In this sketch, direct commentary using a wider lens of race in the United States is established by the fantasy element of being able to listen in on another's thoughts. Unlike the example above, this sketch takes a more direct application of the parodic format by creating a dialectic between the thoughts of the various pairs of social identities and the "voices" of their social identities personified. The implicit character in this case is society itself; in particular, the United States and how our society fails through various dimensions and standpoints of a wide range of citizenry. Both the narrative and the parodic context is maintained without direct dialogue from the absent character, "society," because we (the audience) each know the racial tropes and controlling images that circulate in our collective national, historical, and cultural consciousness. Furthermore, the construction of racial discourse in and of itself and the oft resulting policing of who counts as raced is contested as the black-white binary of race ideology no longer remains relevant in this context. Importantly though, the narratives of these pairs of racial identities does not serve to support or justify a colorblind brand of race in the United States, or lose the historical weight of particular experiences of inequality, namely blacks and Native Americans. The ghosts of Jim Crow racism ("What are those Negroes doing in first class?!"), the effects of structural racism on "respectable" career opportunities for black females and males ("Must be rappers"), and the dual fear of and fascination with black male sexuality, used to justify the abhorrent and violent policing of

black males vis-à-vis white female sexuality ("I better keep an eye on Sara") all form the basis of the white male's characters thoughts. We do not need someone to inform us of *why* or *where* these tropes come from, nor do we question the reason why he would think them.

The history of tension between non-black groups of color (in many cases, immigrant groups) and American blacks is also evoked in the thoughts of the black males. The two males, of unspecified Arabic or Middle Eastern origin, speak in their native tongue, the pitch of their voices raised. The contemporary signifier of the "terrorist" is heavily critiqued and mocked as the subtitles reveal the pair arguing, not as threats to American society, but over the winner of the popular reality TV show, *American Idol*, while maintaining a playful disapproval of American taste. Meaning and intent are confirmed as the thoughts of one of the black males behind them clearly show his belief that all angry, Arabic men are threats to their safety and are "terrorists sons of bitches." Representationally, both the pair of Middle Eastern men and the Native American males are the most stereotypical. The costuming of the Native American males, one younger and bare-chested, the other in the role of the older "chief" wearing a beaded tan top, with both of them in full headdresses, accesses the controlling image of the "noble savage".

The magnitude of the permeation of the symbol of the "noble savage" and the ways in which Native American male sexuality intimately intersected with the construction of American national identity, white male masculine and sexual identity, and continues to manifest itself is invisible in the sketch, as the content focuses on the brutal

and relentless divestiture of lands from native groups ("Me no trust the white man. We better not go to the bathroom. White man might steal my seat and call it Manifest Destiny"). The discourse points to this particular aspect of historical oppression, but unlike the element of social critique along racial *and* sexuality lines regarding black males, it does not address these intersections as well with Native American males as their interlocutor of sorts are two buffaloes who reason that "At least you Indians got casinos. You corn eating bastards." Although, the representational choices still evoke strong semiotic cues of the "noble savage" myth and complex of race, gender, sexuality and the American imaginary (for both males and females), as argued by Joane Nagel (2003) in Chapter 2. In her chapter on "Sex and Race: The Color of Sex in America," she also demonstrates the intricate relationship between sexuality, race and gender in the constructions of European ideas of Africa and blackness in general. Along with the Americas and Asia, Africa figured centrally in the construction of the racialized and sexually exotic other where:

> [T]ales abounded with versions of the monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where, as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes, feminized men's breasts flowed with milk, and militarized women lopped theirs off. Africa and the Americas had become what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination – a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears. (McClintock quoted in Nagel 2003:21-22)

As in the case of indigenous populations in the Americas, the function of the purported sexual promiscuousness of African women and the hyper-sexuality of African men served to justify acts of aggression, the seizure of lands, rape of African women, to

bolster a nascent sense of European cultural and technological superiority, and eventually the justification of chattel slavery (Ibid; Davis 1981; and hooks 1981). The fantasy of black male sexual prowess, causing a range of emotional and psychological responses from fear, disgust, jealousy, and hate, and the sexual willingness of black females, became a cornerstone of black-white racial boundaries (Nagel 2003). Nagel notes how the "sexual stereotyping of Africans is no doubt more familiar to readers of this book than was the hypersexualized rendering of indigenous Americans described in the last chapter." The parallels for her both worked to legitimize acts of brutality, terror, and rape – for Native Americans, in particular the U.S. and colonial policies and practices and sexual abuse of indigenous women by white males and for Africans, in defense of slavery and in particular the "sexual slander" served to mask abhorrent practices like castration, breeding programs, rape, and sexual servitude (Davis 1981 and hooks 1981).

Therefore, while this sketch "misses" in a way the opportunities to challenge the interplay of race, gender, and sexuality in the construction of a Native American racial identity, as Nagel notes, the visibility of the construction of black sexuality, gender and race is much more apparent in contemporary times than the latter. The semiotic effects though of the "noble savage" are still significant, even to the extent that they are "automatic" or unquestioned. It is telling that the white and black characters were dressed in "normal" everyday apparel while still signaling difference (the white father wore conservative khakis and the black characters in business suits), while the other raced characters are beholden to their strict racially and culturally defined dress codes. The content of the social satire for the non-black and non-white characters reveals an

adherence to race as reliant on a black-white binary and silences the important ways in which other racial groups have contributed to our understanding of race. It is important to note that the wide breadth of representation and discourses, despite some of its hiccups, is rare in sketch comedy in general and in transgressive sketches, with the exception of the examples from *The Richard Pryor Show*.

Perhaps the most obvious form of delivering direct and clear commentary or challenges to racism and racist ideology is stand-up. Below four stand-up performances by Richard Pryor and a Native American comic, Charlie Hill on *The Richard Pryor Show*, Moms Mabley, a frequent guest on *The Smothers Brothers*, and George Carlin on *The Flip Wilson Show* will be discussed. Also included herein are several varietals of stand-up: "Ask A Black Dude" with Paul Mooney on *Chappelle's Show*, Chris Rock, as a sports correspondent, on *Weekend Update*, the recurring parody of primetime news on the 16th season of *Saturday Night Live*, and a musical performance by Al Brooks on *The Flip Wilson Show*.

Pryor begins his stand-up by explaining how the network (NBC) wanted people to get to know him better since "American people, they see black people and they get scared…" and so he discusses various topics like how "kids and hillbillies are my favorite people," his family arguing over any money he may leave them after he dies, and the striking behavioral differences between calm and reserved Whites and dramatic and wailing Blacks at funerals. Pryor introduces Charlie Hill, part of the Iroquois Nation, as "new talent" in a separate episode and notes how he gave Pryor the moniker "Black Spirit". Hill begins by asking the audience "Hey, how are you?" then proceeds to

rhythmically repeat the phrase, creating a play on the stereotypical portrayal of Native Americans in popular culture. He jokes how he does not drink "fire water" since it is just like Kryptonite and reenacts how alcoholism has taken its toll on the Native American community – " Drink this, sign this, move here." Regarding the desegregation of schools he dryly observes how "Black kids were driven to white schools, see, Indians were just driven." Hill moves onto the colonization of the Americas, saying "Doesn't it just burn you up when people come over and they never leave?" and to the cultural, social and psychological decimation of Native Americans by whites he explains that while there are no "Indian" holidays. Although "we do celebrate with white people. We dress up like white people and play 'trick or treaty'." Some important conclusions from the content of Hill's stand-up in comparison to the other sketch involving Native Americans on *Chappelle's Show* demonstrate that Hill and Chappelle both draw from similar constructions of satirical content. Hill's stand-up, clever and comically successful, orients itself around the topics of historical disenfranchisement, as in Chappelle's sketch, adding the role alcohol played ("Drink this, sign this, move here"), decentering the availability of the noble savage image, and addresses cross-racial tensions in civil rights movements among non-whites. While Chappelle's sketch succeeded in showing the inconsistencies of living in a mythical colorblind society overall and worked to critically examine the ways in which race and racism continue to simultaneously police and maintain the black-white racial divide and how racial ideology permeates across all racial categories while evoking some intersectional elements, like the strong connection between constructions of masculinity, sexuality, and race, Hill manages to echo these victories and to widen

their breadth and sophistication. The invocation of the noble savage image is accomplished through costuming in Chappelle's version and we, the audience, is left to attach critiques to it, although the chances of this interpretation is slim, as Nagel noted above the invisibility of the connection of Native American masculinity and white masculinity. Indeed, the satirical intent of their representation is not clearly an objective, perhaps choices in costuming were elected to achieve comedy as the contrast between their dress and the other passengers is extreme. On the other hand, Hill, also not employing strictly discursive techniques, decenters the invisibility of the noble savage image. By re-adopting an appropriated version of the intrepid Indian warrior, hooting and howling in excitement as his introductory "Hey, how are you?" he enacts a form of double consciousness as described by DuBois ([1903] 1986):

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world in which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt or pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (374-375)

This second sight forms the foundation of Chappelle's sketch of exploring the tensions between projections of self via conflicting outcomes of racist ideology – each pair of passengers is equally complicit in their racial and racist judgments and through this both their individuality and humanity (the pair of Middle Eastern men in reality and to us are

regular guys on a plane bickering over a popular reality TV show) are affirmed while at the same time the existence and validation of another image, one that is damaging, limiting, and stereotypical, is manifested. In essence, the pairs in the sketch can be doubled so that the representation, the effects and power of a hierarchical racist society are made incarnate, as they are critiqued just as much as the actual, corporeal and flawed characters who sustain their propagation. Although DuBois locates double consciousness in the black male, he locates this "seventh son" in the context of world civilizations, bringing our attention to his particularity in the American context. Taking into account the arguments advanced by Nagel, the appropriateness of the application of DuBoisian double sight to another American seventh son, the Native American male, is clear. As Nagel argued, while the constructions of the Indian and the African supported different aspects of the concretization of American, white male masculinity, they were intertwining parts created for the same purpose. And in his introduction, Hill effectively demonstrates the kind of second sight he has as he performs "Indian" while chanting a commonplace greeting. It comes as little surprise that he chose the image of the noble savage to perform, since it forms the backbone of both Native American and white masculinity – both forms are imagined, but only one form has the ability to create distance and to observe, all while maintaining a separate, albeit incomplete sense of self. He does not reclaim the image, if anything he demonstrates the absurdity of its stereotypical practices and shows how the Indian is both a part of and separate from another, alternate identity.

At first glance, Hill's statement regarding the desegregation of schools could be interpreted as an attempt to needlessly compare and contrast the civil rights struggles of non-white groups. But the invisibility of the history and role that the construction of the Indian ultimately had on race ideology, given Nagel's important insights regarding the inseparability of the constructions of the Americas, Africa, and Asia (the "porno-tropics[15]") in the construction of nation, whiteness, and masculinity in the United States, becomes the focus of his social satire. The acknowledgement of the civil rights struggle to integrate schools firstly confers an amount of consciousness to Hill's satirical content indicating an understanding of other aspects of the ways in which racism operated. His leap then, through the use of wordplay, to the alternate ways in which racism "drove" Native Americans becomes less about a game of racial pity poker and more about the varying ways in which racist ideology subordinates non-whites for the purposes of the construction of and maintenance of white supremacy and privileges. This approach though also allows for the interrogation of the history of race and racism as a far-reaching and systematic program that has, since its earliest conceptions, relied not only a black-white binary, but a white-other binary.

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[15] Nagel cites Anne McClintock who asserts that European explorations and colonial abuses were justified by a paradigm that combined sexuality, race, and gender: "For centuries, the uncertain continents – Africa, the Americas, Asia – were figured in European lore as libidinously eroticized. Travelers' tales abounded with versions of the monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where, as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes, feminized men's breasts flowed with milk, and militarized women lopped theirs off. Africa and the Americas had become what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination – a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears" (McClintock quoted in Nagel 2003:92-93).

Moms Mabley, a notable and rare (even in contemporary times) female black comedian, on her second guest spot on *The Smother Brothers Show*, is introduced by Dick Smothers with a question from fan mail about whether she has any other clothes. Mabley tells a variety of stories including a dying woman who confesses her infidelity to her husband who already knew so had poisoned her, a classroom where a white teacher asks two white students to spell "cat" and "rat" and a black student "chrysanthemum", a wake (Mabley has a short aside where she says she is ignorant to whether white people have wakes, but that "we do") wherein a grieving widow finds out her husband was unfaithful and so changes the tribute on his casket from "rest in peace" to "rest in peace until we meet again," and facing death row, a white bank robber confesses to a black bank robber that he is afraid and "can't take it like a man" because he is not "used to it".

Mabley, like Hill, discusses the desegregation of schools, but the content of her social satire has more specificity, which may be a factor of the difference in decades of their appearances (Mabley in 1967 and Hill in 1977), a difference in standpoint, or most likely, a combination of both. Clearly, the issue of integration of schools in 1967 was more of a controversial topic of debate and contention. Interestingly, Mabley's critique sounds oddly contemporary, as she recounts a situation of racism in a classroom, when the popular perspectives, according to bell hooks (2003), largely viewed integration as the long-awaited realization of racial justice and equality, while less popular black nationalist perspectives expressed concern of entrusting the education of black children to exclusively white schools and white teachers embedded in racial hegemony. Drawing partly from her experience growing up in the south during desegregation, hooks recounts

the unintended ways in which segregation spurned solidarity, critical consciousness and eventually racial uplift:

> During the period of racial segregation in our nation, when the vast majority of black folks were involved in a politics of racial uplift, segregated schools were the location where black students were encouraged to embrace education as the necessary path to freedom. In our all-black schools we were taught standards of excellence in relation to both our academic studies and our construction of self and identity. The ethics and values we were taught in our schools mirrored those taught in home and church. In our schools we were taught the value and importance of self-love. (83)

But hooks notes how during the civil rights era, the admonitions of black nationalists like Amiri Baraka and Haki Madhubuti that viewed integration, without serious and deep change to racial ideology, as cultural genocide were not taken seriously by black parents. hooks recounts:

> Naturally, black parents raised in brutal racial apartheid in the south were initially more conscientious when the schools were desegregated and their children were about to be educated by the very same white folks who had proclaimed the need for segregation because of black inferiority. They were mindful of the ways we were taught. When I came home in the late sixties and told my parents that my white teachers were so dumb that they told us black people had not written books, we saw this as just another gesture of white arrogance. It would not have occurred to us to allow ourselves to be the victims of this racist ignorance. Given the white supremacist milieu of the times, no one assumed that white schools would provide us information about blackness. (86)

Encountering the kind of blatant racism and hostility as told by Mabley in the classroom encouraged black students in the 70s and 80s to drop out, and those that did manage to gain entry into white colleges and universities often left without a degree. A critical race consciousness, largely incompatible with the overt and covert racist climate of

educational institutions, created an unbearable environment leading either to assimilation or departure. Mabley's characterization of the unequal treatment of white and black students where the main objective is to confirm beliefs regarding black inferiority needs little comic manipulation. Grounded in a situation that all too closely mimics real life in real time directly contributes to its comic tenability and, importantly, does not obscure its transgressive potential. Similar to Chappelle, Mabley counters dominant, single-voiced discourses (black students are inferior) by entering the comic space which tolerates multivocality and oppositional perspectives (white teachers are racist; black students are just as capable; or whiteness is a privilege), to challenge and ultimately to refashion meaning of the original and hidden dominant discourse. An important difference to note is the lesser amount that Mabley has to "hide" her satirical content compared to her black male counterparts, like Chappelle, Pryor, and Wilson, who rely on metaphor, insinuation, and as we saw, in the extreme, a "pretty, singing white girl" to deliver their messages challenging racial hegemony. Discussed earlier, Scoey Mitchell was also a familiar guest on *Smothers Brothers* who also did not "hide" his assaults on racist logic and thus, perhaps the difference could be attributed to the differences in shows. While the effect of gender is not readily apparent when comparing Mitchell and Mabley, it is worth noting the possibility of a difference in ranges of permissibility in the comic sphere between female and male performers. The significance of these differences and their interactions with other social identities has been well established (Davis 1981; hooks 1981 and 1984; and Collins 2000).

A racist judicial system is also examined in her stand-up along with an allusion to the linkages between white and black masculinities, which relies on a similar form of black[16] humor as the chrysanthemum joke, where the source of laughter is how ridiculous it is that the instance in which a black male has an "advantage" over a white male revolves around the reality that dying or the constant threat of bodily harm and violence is a normal and common aspect of the black male experience. It is within this context as well that Mabley's other jokes are interpreted – not as reinforcement of racist logic that the heterosexual love and sexuality of blacks are degenerate, characterized by infidelity, treachery, and ultimately deadly violence – as alternate stances to the same representation. Mabley does not transform or even challenge this stereotypical portrayal of black heterosexual love, but she also does not deride it, since she claims it and laughs alongside it, not at it. The issue is at hand is not to determine whether Mabley has internalized this stereotype of racist beliefs, but rather to examine the ways in which she

[16] I follow Donna Goldstein's (2003) use of the category "black humor" in her study on women's resistance and popular culture in the favelas, or shantytowns of Rio de Janeiro, as understood through its usage by Andre Breton in the Surrealist movement as a formidable political weapon: "For Breton: 'Black humor is bounded by too many things, such as stupidity, skeptical irony, joking without seriousness…(the enumeration would be long), but it is preeminently the mortal enemy of sentimentality' (Breton in Pratt 1993:17). Breton and the surrealists understood sentimentality to be a characteristic of bourgeois culture; it therefore became the object of derision for the surrealists, which helps explain why their art is based on shock, absurdity, demented humor, and the incongruous juxtaposition of subconscious and fantastic imagery – a decidedly unsentimental assault on bourgeois taste. It was intended to be aesthetically displeasing and ungratifying – the whole point was to disturb. For Breton, black humor became a discursive weapon that could be used to symbolically contest the dominant discourse of society; accordingly, it was potentially antididactic in that its purpose was to revolt against the prevailing dominant ideology" (277-278).

simultaneously acknowledges its presence while changing the typical route of interpretation, toward repulsion to humorous and tragic stories of bickering couples; they acquire the depth and relatability absent from stereotypy used to uphold racism. The subtle move she employs can be likened to the stark differences in interpreting the same actions between men and women due to operating sexist cultural morays. An assertive and confident woman is interpreted as pushy, demanding, and at its worst (but entirely common), a bitch, whereas men, enacting similar stances, are praised, respected, and labeled leaders. The actions do not change, but our capacities to read them similarly is obscured by the dictates of gender norms and roles; similarly, Mabley recounts vignettes of love, betrayal, and loss – all too familiar narratives of romantic love in general – and set apart from the obscuring effects of racist ideology, these are not *black* stories, they are stories told from the perspective of a black female comedian. Just as stories about persons occupying positions of hegemonic privilege[17] retain their individuality and do not become overarching truths (stereotypes and controlling images) about others occupying a similar position. Clearly, these examples pale in comparison to the effectiveness of her other jokes concerning structural racism, but their magnitude should not be underestimated, as these "small" transformations of representation are a crucial

[17] I refer here to positions of privilege like gender (male), race (white), class (middle and upper classes), and sexuality (heterosexuality). In many cases though, as the pioneers of intersectionality (Davis 1981; hooks 1981; and Collins 2000) have demonstrated, various points of privilege intersect and manifest depending on the social, cultural, and economic situations, as black males can hold privilege in their gender, white females in their race. While not as thoroughly theorized, the privilege that heterosexual non-white women hold in their sexuality is of note as well.

component linked to the recovery of the black psyche, another arena repeatedly ignored, to disastrous and "slow to die" outcomes (hooks 2003). The resulting ambivalence from addressing representational transformation, seen to a lesser degree in, for example, Pryor's reinvention of the cowboy/gunslinger, is most likely attributed to the complications that arise from addressing change on intersecting planes of subordinated social identities. Efforts to reclaim and redefine the contours of meaning also manifest through the proliferation of female presence in hip hop and rap music videos. Hip hop and rap, at once a site for repressed creative expression and validation of blackness and at other times bemoaned for its glorification of violence and negative stereotypes of black males and culture, also drew attention and criticism for hypersexualized images of black women and their consistent objectification in lyrics and music videos. By focusing on black female performers, Rana Emerson (1995) examines the ways in which black women use popular culture and finds that in some instances they reproduce gender and racial oppression, others are more successful at redefinition and opposition, and a number of attempts produce ambivalent results. Her conclusions echo the findings of Jhally and Lewis and Gray, that whatever the maneuver of cultural negotiation, they exist within the confines of dominant common sense, whereby some hegemonic reproduction is unavoidable. Therefore when Missy Elliot advances her counter-hegemonic narratives, appearance and style of a powerful, sexually mature and confident woman, she does so against the backdrop of a peep show, reinforcing traditional and oppressive styles of normative male sexual dominance and desire. Rather than a clear reproduction of patriarchal values, Emerson contends that in efforts to construct an alternate discourse

and representation that does not submerge (or erase) sexuality under gender equality results in a seeming contradiction. While not complete, or perfect, examples like Missy Elliot work to challenge and dislodge the stability and power of the Jezebel stereotype and controlling image of black female sexuality as insatiable, uncontrollable and deviant.

The other transgressive sketches used direct commentary in formats that resembled stand-up. Paul Mooney, respected for his comedic prowess and extensive experience with writing comedy (he was both a cast member and writer) for *The Richard Pryor Show* and contributed to seasons of *In Living Color*, to name a few, made guest appearances on *Chappelle's Show* in the recurring sketch, "Ask a Black Dude with Paul Mooney" where everyday people can ask questions about race. In the initial introduction to the series, Chappelle said:

> I know a lot of you white people at home have questions for your black friends that you wanna ask them but you're afraid to ask. You don't want to alienate yourself, or maybe, get beat the fuck up! Well, I want to promote conversation and dialogue, so I went on the streets and gave people the opportunity to ask all the questions that made them so curious and I got comedian Paul Mooney (audience members react strongly with exclamations of excitement) to answer these question for them. If you don't know Paul Mooney, he was a writer for Richard Pryor for many years and some say, one of the best comedians working today. Well, one thing's for dame sure – he's an unofficial sociologist. Ladies and gentleman, it's time for "Ask a Black Dude."

The Q&A session with Mooney goes as follows:

> Hispanic male: Why in the movies, is the first guy killed always black?
>
> Paul Mooney: That happy nigger that's in the movie where he kills all the white people (see *The Green Mile* on the screen), the big black runaway, he was throughout the whole movie, he only got killed at the end. Which I hated. I hated that movie, because I hated him, I hated everyone that wrote

> that movie. Black people always worried about liking *Barbershop*, they should be worried about what they're saying in white films. White films go all over the world; because I remember *The Godfather*. I won't forget when they had the drug scene and they said, "Well we don't do that. Sell it to the niggers." We should have something to say about that. (Mooney looks to the side) Is the camera still on?
>
> Stephen King (author of *The Green Mile*): Black people want to go to black dentists and white people want to get buried by black (pauses) undertakers.
>
> Mooney: That's funny. Stephen King – he almost said nigger, I read between…I'm not into black dentists, please, if they can fix the teeth, cool, if they can't, it's cool too. That's kind of a weird question, coming from Stephen King, that was very strange. A horror man coming on asking a question about a nigger, that was already scary. I wrote a script for Stephen King, a Stephen King horror movie – a *Nigger with a Brain*. We'll see how that's scary. And *Niggers in School*. How 'bout that Stephen?

Mooney directly critiques the interconnectedness of race and the production of popular culture. Highlighting the concerns regarding representation on white films versus black films becomes couched in terms of the magnitude of the reach of films. He simultaneously supports the theoretical positions of Hall (1989), hooks (1992), and Gray (1995) that popular culture representations do matter, as they are significant planes of identification and perpetuation of racist ideology and more generally the positions of Grindstaff and Turow (2006), Fiske (1992 and 1996) and others who demonstrate these effects for other social identifications as well. Additionally, his choice to use *The Green Mile* as an example, perhaps at first blush seems oxymoronic since a typical reading of the film might suggest it as a film that presents a black male character as a powerful, sympathetic, and moral, hero. In the story and the movie, John Coffey (Michael Clarke

Duncan) the "big black runaway" is wrongly accused of raping and killing two young white twin sisters in Louisiana in 1935. He is described as shy, soft-spoken and emotional, with mysterious, magical powers that allow him to control various physical afflictions for healing and destructive purposes.[18] When asked, at various points in the film, to explain his abilities to Paul Edgecomb, the noble prison guard character played by Tom Hanks, Coffey explains that he "took it back" and after the death of "Wild Bill" Wharton, who is responsible for Coffey's crimes, and the psychological decimation of the sadistic prison guard, Coffey gives Paul "part of himself" so that he can psychically witness John's innocence. Paul, seeing Coffey's innocence, offers to open the prison doors and let him walk out, but Coffey "rightly tired of the pain" elects to remain on death row and is executed. The end of the movie returns to the present time of 1999 where a tortured Paul has outlived all of his friends and family members, inexplicably given an unusually long life span, attributed to some side effect of being healed by Coffey. Now 108 years old, Paul believes this to be his punishment from god for Coffey's execution and wonders how much longer he will have to live.

The works of Slavoj Zizek (1993), in the chapter "Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself!" and Manthia Diawara's (1988) article "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance" help to situate an alternate reading of the *Green Mile's* plot

[18] Coffey resurrects a mouse, cures the urinary tract infection of the good prison guard (Tom Hanks), saves the warden's wife from terminal cancer and transfers the illness to the sadistic prison guard (Doug Hutchinson), who, before entering a state of permanent catatonia, shoots and kills William "Wild Bill" Wharton (Sam Rockwell), the violent psychopath responsible for the rape and murders Coffey was wrongly accused and imprisoned for.

and thus legitimizing Mooney's full and passionate rejection of the representation and characterization of Coffey. Diawara contends that black male viewers experience psychological "resistance" to the racist portrayals of black male characters in movies such as *The Birth of a Nation*, *The Color Purple* (1986)*, Rocky II* (1979)*, A Soldier's Story* (1984) *and Forty-Eight Hours* (1982). He describes the position of the spectator in response to the cinematic apparatus as "a recourse to the psychoanalytic account of the mirror phase, suggesting that the metapsychology of identification (with the camera or point of enunciation) entails a narcissistic form of regression which leads to a state similar to the infant's illusion of a unified ego" (Diawara 1988:66). But since spectators are socially, historically and psychically constructed along gender, race, and sexuality lines, Diawara argues that these components of difference result in varying readings of the same material (67). Diawara, hooks, and Shively each demonstrate the various ways in which spectators are conscious and engaged, and in the case of racial identification and meaning-making, experience resistance to racist tropes and representations or refashion the attachment to a mythical white hero through frames that sidestep hegemonic historical revisionism. While the processes of varying interpretations and psychological resistance to racist images and stories has been established (and supported generally by Bakhtinian heteroglossia), some question may remain regarding the presence of racist representation and narrative in *The Green Mile*. By all accounts, the narrative seems to support a reading that induces sympathy for Coffey and indignation for a cruel, unjust and racist world. When we take into account the important theoretical contributions to understanding the relationship between Lacanian psychoanalysis, nationalism, race and racism, and

ideology in general, as advanced by Slavoj Zizek though, the strong elements of racist logic are easily revealed. Zizek evaluates modern racism (and accounts for its persistence despite civil rights efforts and the surge and institutionalization of political correctness) as a product of the characteristics of nationalism, which to remain viable, has at its core a shared attachment to, in Lacanian terms, a Thing, or Enjoyment (jouissance). It is Zizek's characterization of the racist as believing the other has "it" – some special substance that if only returned would then an infinite amount of problems be resolved – that structures the representation of Coffey's black male with his secret, inexplicable powers and the related relationship to Edgecomb's white male who not only needs this power, but receives it from Coffey and is granted a type of immortality. Adding insult to injury, the white hero is resentful of this gift, believing it to be a curse. Here, it becomes plain how the plot supports an identification with Edgecomb's character, who despite his acknowledgment of his failures, is the reluctant and flawed, but morally conscious protagonist. In this world, the other does indeed have "it", grants it to the white male, sacrifices his own life despite his innocence, and still remains the source of the white male's wretched existence. While Mooney specifically references the killing of John Coffey as the organizing detail of his utter disgust and rejection of the film, his overall statement "I hated that movie, because I hated him, I hated everyone that wrote that movie" is entirely comprehensible with the application of Zizek's theorization of nationalism and racism using a Lacanian lens. The portrayal of Coffey is deeply racist[19]

[19] Coffey's characterization also recalls the racist images of the happy house slave who is simple-minded, shy, and loyal to his white master, combined with representations of the

and Mooney voices his unequivocal resistance to it. It is difficult to know whether Stephen King was responding to Mooney's evaluation of the film, or had it summarized for him by either Dave Chappelle, or someone on the production staff, since that was not included. With that said, King's bizarre statement regarding the preferences of blacks for black dentists certainly evoke segregationist sentiments of "separate yet equal". Mooney's retort, though laced with racial epithets, draws the attention back to a critique of popular culture and racial representation that fails to provide alternate roles and stories that disrupt racial hegemony; as he rightly acknowledges, films with representations of educated blacks, black protagonists, black heroes, and black love interests that do not rely on racist ideology are so rare, to see them would be so unusual, it would be scary.

Chris Rock, a part of the cast of the 16th season of *Saturday Night Live*, despite limited exposure, delivered pithy and biting critiques of race in the media. In the following examples, Rock plays a crime correspondent on *Weekend Update* in one and a sports correspondent in the other. In the first, Rock makes observations about the raced nature of crime, that "black people are not crazy, but they do stupid things, but if you hear about chopped up bodies and playing with toes, that's probably a white guy." He continues commenting on the different experiences whites and blacks have watching news stories on crime: "white people wait to confirm that it is a black person and black people are begging for it not to be." Rock accomplishes a successful critique and reversal of the persistent racist linkage between blackness and criminality by, much in the same

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physically intimidating and hypersexual black male body, and the related threats to innocent, white female sexuality.

vein as Pryor, decentering the link between race and criminality in general by joking about the differences in types of "white" and "black" crimes. Alluding to black crime as a product of largely socially determined causes, ("they do stupid things") is contrasted with the "crazy" characteristics of crimes related to psychopathy, a segment disproportionately represented by white males. While establishing a stronger and clearer link between the "stupid" things black people do and determining social forces[20] would have certainly bolstered Rock's general critique and ensured satirical intent, the extremely limited presence of Rock on SNL contextualizes his "choice". As discussed in the previous chapter, while already rare, SNL has produced progressive discourse critiquing racist ideology, but ultimately ambivalent because of the lukewarm nature of the satirical content. Other than Rock's periodic appearances on *Weekend Update*, the opportunity for a direct commentary style of satire and critique regarding race was not explored, although there was one instance in the 3rd season of *Saturday Night Live* in the 1970s, with the anchors played by Jane Curtin and Dan Akroyd, where the pair reported on the Illinois Supreme Court deciding that the display of the swastika symbol of the Nazi party was a constitutional right. The anchors bluntly and seriously promise their willingness to bend "anyone into a swastika free of charge." In addition in season 16, Dana Carvey's perfect mimicry of then president George H.W. Bush in two separate situations: riffing on Bush's ethnocentricism as he reflects how then possible opponent Mario Cuomo would

[20] To name a few: unequal access and at times, blockage from educational and employment opportunities, healthy foods, and healthcare, housing discrimination, racial profiling, and the psychological effects of existing in a society that consistently devalues your skin color, hair texture, and cultural history.

never succeed since he could not recall any past presidents whose last names ended in vowels and the re-creation the former president's post-war address when he predicts Colin Powell as the future first black president of the United States are good examples of the type of race progressiveness typical of the show. The focus on Bush's ethnocentricism recalls John Hartigan's important point in his article on white identities that one of the primary functions of the "redneck" the "hillbilly" and "white trash" identities is so that middle and upper middle class whites can transfer all white racism onto a form of insider-outsider group that allows them to simultaneously admit to the presence of racism, but claim no responsibility for it. Furthermore, these examples of satire regarding race tend to rely on either the most extreme forms of racism (Nazi party and "serious" racism) or the racial superstars (Colin Powell) that represent the highest echelon of success and are characteristic of "enlightened racism", that strategically uses these extraordinary examples of "making it" as evidence of a post-racial society where the lack of equality rests squarely on the shoulders of those experiencing inequality (Jhally and Lewis 1992 and Bonilla-Silva 2003). While Rock's critique of race and crime represents a slightly diluted version of sketches on *Chappelle's Show* and *The Richard Pryor Show* given the context in which his satirical content on race is mediated, he still manages to discursively disrupt the strong racist link between blackness and criminality and to foment the grounds for that secondary, strong black voice and perspective to emerge.

In the second, Rock as a sports correspondent, struggles with wanting to place a bet on the upcoming Hollyfield and Buster Douglas fight and not understanding why

Douglas is not favored more. He continues by saying that white males are not good at boxing, but black and Hispanic males are, reasoning:

> The lower you go on the social ladder, the better you can fight. For every Puerto Rican fighter, there's an American Indian waiting to kick his ass. I feel so sorry for the American Indian, we took, I mean *we* didn't, *you* took their land and now they have nothing, everyone exploits the Indians, we got Mazola, Cleveland Indians, the Redskins, the Redskins, that's not nice, that's a racial slur, that's kind of like having the New York Niggers, okay? Remember the commercial the Indian had a tear in his eye because of pollution, he wasn't crying because of pollution, he's crying because you raped his wife, okay? I don't think he was crying because there was a can on the ground, I mean, huh, Dennis (Miller), what was I talking about?

This type of direct and clearly transgressive racial discourse led Simon Weaver (2011) in his convincingly argued analysis of the significance of racist jokes, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*, to highlight Rock, along with the stand-up of Richard Pryor and others, as examples of reversals of racist logic. Since Weaver's analysis relied on single-authored comedic discourses in stand-up, the conflict with mediating production forces as in Rock's appearances on SNL allows for a more consistent body of work. In his chapter, "Reverse Discourse Strategies in Black Comic Performance," he explains: "'Success' in this humour…refers not just to the generation of laughter but also, on the one hand, to the perceived impact on anti-racist discourse *vis-à-vis* intentionality, and on the other hand, to any connotations provoked *vis-à-vis*, racist ideology" (Weaver 2011:120, emphasis in original). Later, arguing for the legitimacy of humor as a form of resistance, he details the use of humor during the Nazi occupation:

> An illuminating example appears in Bryant (2006), who describes how humour was used as a form of resistance by Czech nationals under Nazi occupation (see Stokker 2001, for similar examples in Norway).

> Importantly, and although only implicitly highlighted by Bryant, a part of the function of this resistance humour was the resolution of ambivalence, through the presentation of the resistance movement as unambiguously united…Bryant describes jokes as an ideal form of symbolic resistance because, '[o]vert, easily translated political statements could lead to trouble, but jokes were too nebulous, too slippery to get one arrested. Jokes, with their ironic tones and ambiguous messages, flew underneath the radar of the Nazi authorities' (2006: 140). He also describes the existence of ambivalence in the social situation where resistance humour emerged. In Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, 'ambiguity and uncertainty…constituted the essence of everyday life for most Protectorate inhabitants' (2006: 136). Bryant theorises the function of resistance joke telling as a 'safety valve,' or 'a harmless vent that allowed Czechs to continue working in factories while maintaining a vague sense of patriotism and integrity' (2006: 148). He explains that the '[j]okes were also a way of coping, staving off despair and attempting to come to terms with a world that lacked order and clarity' (2006: 149). His comments suggest that a significant connection existed between the jokes acting as a safety valve and the ambivalence or lack of order in the society in which they were told. (Weaver 2011:122)

Establishing the grounds that jokes are far more than silly afterthoughts to other serious forms of resistance, he describes:

> Rock's comedy deals uncompromisingly with American race and ethnic relations, and racism, providing many examples of racist discourse. What follows shows Rock resisting and attacking white racist attitudes to black vernacular and linguistic competence, through mimicking and mocking comments directed at Colin Powell:
>
> Colin Powell can't be president…whenever Colin Powell's on the news white people always give him the same compliments, always the same compliments, 'How do you feel about Colin Powell?' 'He speaks so well,' 'he's so well spoken,' 'he speaks so well,' 'I mean, he really speaks well,' 'he speaks so well.' Like that's a compliment! Speaks so well's not a compliment okay, speaks so well's some shit you say about retarded people that can talk. What do you mean he speaks so well?...He's a fucking educated man, how the fuck do you expect him to sound? You dirty motherfuckers, what're you talking about? 'Speaks so well,' what you talking about, 'he speaks so well.' What voice were you looking to come out of his mouth? What the fuck did you expect him to sound like?

> ‘I’m gonna drop me a bomb ta-day, I be pres-o-dent,’ get the fuck of here (Rock 1996). (128)

In his rhetorical analysis of the above from Rock, Weaver acknowledges how a racist interpretation would elect to focus on Rock’s concluding remark mocking the racist perception of a black president (“I’m gonna drop me a bomb ta-day, I be pres-o-dent”) saying:

> A racist reading would need to distance itself completely from Rock’s preferred meaning, perhaps by concentrating on the final line of the quote, which impersonates the stereotypical depiction of Powell. The extent that Rock, and Pryor, use techniques to stretch the incongruity, so that the stereotypes are pushed away from the racist habitus in which they emerge, creates far more effective reversal and resistance humour, which is perhaps why they are recognized as two of the most significant black US stand-up comedians *vis-à-vis* their stance on racism. This is something that is not achieved in the British comedy of Hunter and Henry, but is also framed by the context of black resistance to US race relations in the post-civil rights era. (128)

Weaver’s categorization of Rock’s brand of antiracist comedy as typically the most effective type of “reversal and resistance humour” further helps to contextualize transgressive-ambivalent examples from Rock on SNL discussed in the previous chapter. In the above example, Rock, playing a sports correspondent, likens the facility to box to the racial hierarchy in the US and, along with Charlie Hill’s stand-up performance on *The Richard Pryor Show* (1977), provides the most transgressive racial discourse regarding Native Americans out of the entire sample of sketch comedy shows examined herein over four decades. He demonstrates the nuance of race and racism in the United States by demonstrating its effects beyond the black-white binary, a point not frequently

accomplished in other forms of transgressive racial discourses and representations. In his analogy, the least (and most privileged) talented at boxing/fighting are whites, while blacks are better, but, "for every Puerto Rican fighter, there's an American Indian waiting to kick his ass." The invisibility of the histories of inequality, oppression, and subordination of the Asian diaspora[21] in the United States is of course an unfortunate oversight. But given the near dearth of transgressive racial discourses and representations

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[21] Ronald Takaki's (1989) classic *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* exhaustively demonstrates the history of Asian American oppression and subordination in the United States, to name a few, Korean experiences on sugar plantations in Hawaii, wage exploitation, racist immigration policies that often barred the entry of families of laborers to avoid permanent settlement and citizenship, and the insidious "model minority" myth. He also establishes the racialization of Asian Americans in 19th century America: "The Chinese migrants found that racial qualities previously assigned to blacks quickly became 'Chinese' characteristics. Calling for Chinese exclusion, the *San Francisco Alta* warned: 'Every reason that exists against the toleration of free blacks in Illinois may be argued against that of the Chinese here.' White workers referred to the Chinese as 'nagurs,' and a magazine cartoon depicted the Chinese as a bloodsucking vampire with slanted eyes, a pigtail, dark skin, and thick lips. Like blacks, the Chinese were described as heathen, morally inferior, savage, childlike, and lustful. Chinese women were condemned as a 'depraved class,' and their depravity was associated with their physical appearance, which seemed to show 'but a slight removal from the African race.' Chinese men were seen as sensuous creatures, especially interested in white women" (101). The constructions of black female and male sexuality and Native American female and male sexuality bear striking resemblances. In *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th century America*, Takaki (2000) expertly establishes the interconnectedness of white attitudes toward Asians, blacks, Mexicans, and Native Americans and urges cross-racial examinations of race and racism. In his Epilogue, Takaki delivers the following eloquent analysis and plea: "However, as America enters the twenty-first century, equality as a fact for all Americans is still a dream deferred. The republican 'iron cage' still perpetuates a structure of discrimination that determines where minorities, especially African Americans and Latinos, live, go to school, and work, excluding them from competing on a level playing field for educational and employment opportunities. Disproportionately poor, they are blamed as victims of their own lack of 'republican virtues' of hard work and individual responsibility…In the coming multicultural century, Americans will have to make choices about how they define their national identity and future" (303).

that go beyond the black-white binary, Rock's more visionary critique of race ideology still remains unique and necessary. He effectively incorporates the appropriation of the noble savage image in terms of the language of a black-white ideological understanding of race when he describes the history of dispossession and the shape of racism toward Native Americans:

> I feel so sorry for the American Indian, we took, I mean we didn't, you took their land and now they have nothing, everyone exploits the Indians, we got Mazola, Cleveland Indians, the Redskins, the Redskins, that's not nice, that's a racial slur, that's kind of like having the New York Niggers okay?

A form of cross-racial solidarity encouraged by Takaki (2000) is accomplished here as he analogizes racism toward Native Americans by invoking the extremely charged "nigger" to "redskin", in the comedic climactic moment in his short performance. Furthermore, he is clear to establish the boundary between whites and blacks in their historical culpability in the genocide, land dispossession, and the punitive programs of forced cultural assimilation, by moving from "we" (Americans) to "we didn't" (blacks) to "you" (whites). Rock also touches on the inter-connectedness of race, gender, and sexuality argued by Joane Nagel (2003) through the mocking of the use of the noble savage image by white-dominated advertising, a point missed in the other two sketches with transgressive material regarding Native Americans (sketch on *Chappelle's Show* and Charlie Hill's stand-up on *The Richard Pryor Show*). Deriding some PSA warning about pollution that pictures a crying Native American male, Rock challenges and attacks interpretation with reversal. In this semantic maneuver, he brings to the

foreground the often ignored sexual violence aspect, also missing in analyses of race and racism for blacks and other groups,[22] wherein the "noble savage" is not fulfilling the constraining and sanitized version of Native Americans and is, instead, in a wretched state not because "there was a can on the ground," or because of "pollution, he's crying because you raped his wife, okay?"

In the boldest interpretation and with an eerily near-accurate prescience, Pryor plays the 40th president of the United States, the first to be held by a black male. During a press conference, reporters grill him on various topics: the neutron bomb, unemployment rates, the possible appointment of Huey Lewis as the Director of the FBI, the declining presence of black players in the NFL, his romantic pursuits of white women, and whether the president's mother, formerly a maid, would clean a reporter's (played by a white male) house after he leaves office. This format allows Pryor to introduce direct commentary on issues of race and racism. With regard to questions about unemployment he frankly states the relationship of race to income and class:

> The 5% poverty level mostly pertains to white America, black America and the minority situation is up to as high as 45% and we will try with all our efforts to lower that rate to about 20%, of course, it will always be lower in white areas, but we should try and emerge a *United* (emphasis) States.

To the concern over declining numbers of professional black football players, he explains the necessity for a diversity of positions for blacks in the NFL and quips: "We're going to have black coaches and owners, as long as we have football, there's going to be some

[22] See *Women, Race, and Class* by Angela Davis (1981).

black in it." He also confronts the inequality in the space program: "I feel like it's time that black people went to space. White people have been going to space for years and spacing out on it, if you will…" In lieu of Beethoven, Brahms and Tchaikovsky, future space shuttles will be filled with the songs of Miles Davis and Charlie Parker that would travel to different galaxies and engage in a plethora of "different kinds of things". When asked repeatedly about his penchant for dating white women, his response "as long as I can keep it up," delivered with deadpan intensity, shifts to facetious banter, asking "Why do you think they call it the White House?" Pryor's character finally loses his temper when a white male reporter inquires about the availability of his mother's housekeeping services once he leaves office, and is joined by the angry reactions of black reporters. Now a viably hostile environment, secret service agents surround the president and despite his unwillingness to exit, carry him out of the room. Pryor's first black president addresses many spheres of inequality due to race and racism, both the structural ("serious") and the popular (sports and space program; "secondary" concerns), but when read intersectionally, reveals some important cleavages regarding gender and race and sexuality and race. Arguably, Pryor addresses many masculine areas of social critique – sports, NASA, and employment – and includes women in two distinct capacities: as his mother and his sexual relationships with white women. Transgressive racial discourses and representations for black women therefore are subsumed under the umbrella of (male) racial uplift, an unfortunate trend in black nationalism historically and continues to be a contemporary issue (Collins 2000). The reenactment of Pryor's well-publicized and controversial relationships with white women seems to function as more of a

personal form of resistance from Pryor to the general American public. Resistance in the form of a knowing wink-wink brand of wordplay predominates his second retort to reporters probing about his romantic engagements as he asks: "Why do you think they call it the White House?" His first reply to the question, "as long as I can keep it up," while not forcefully addressing the construction of black males as uncontrollable, hypersexual with predatory designs on white women, does nod toward it. Pryor succeeds more at challenging this racist representation elsewhere, in his reinterpretation of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, discussed earlier in this chapter. In that sketch, which portrays the vindication of a black male wrongly accused of raping a white woman, the racist representation is fully challenged, while in the current example, Pryor confirms his sexual desire for white women despite the social prescriptions forbidding it and interpretation is made vulnerable. Lastly, the generalized portrayal of women within the virgin/whore binary (mother/sexual object) remains problematic for progressive and transgressive depictions of women and their sexuality of all races.

In Living Color also explores the possibility of a future black president (for them in the year 2000). Damon Wayans parodies Jesse Jackson at the final press conference of his two term presidency by enacting Jackson's proclivity to use rhymes in his speeches. For instance, when asked whether he was surprised when he was elected to office, he responds: "Who would've thought a poor, black kid could go from the outhouse to the White House?" The emphasis here is on the uncanny ability of Wayans to channel Jackson and is entirely comically successful. The satirical edge and the potential for substantive subversive intervention present in Pryor's version of a black president is lost

though, because it is stunted at the mere insertion of blackness into a dominant, white political space. Both shows explicitly challenge the dominion of power as it intersects with race by creating a future that has presumably defeated current day inequalities. But the sketch on *In Living Color* is defined by parodying the idiosyncrasies of a notable black, political figure (which of course only confuses meaning – who would elect a compulsively rhyming presidential candidate?) with no focus on political or social satire. Pryor's interpretation, without losing a comedic beat, succeeds in legitimizing the possibility *and* the legitimacy of blacks obtaining political power, all while acknowledging the durability of a racial hierarchy and potential areas for wider implementation of racial equality. Two ironic identities noted by Perinbanayagam – the fool and the jester – are used to reverse the existing social world and to employ critique and transgression through discursive devices. The fool in particular, integral to Bakhtinian carnivalesque ([1968] 1984), incites disorder and misrule with the express intention to increase meaning, to liberate, to expand, and to encourage metamorphosis. Ubiquitous in carnival culture were images of the grotesque[23] suggesting fertility and abundance, encapsulating its triumphant and positive spirit. Through their ambivalence, grotesque images created liminal spaces that defy all that is ordered and oppressive:

> Necessity, in every concept which prevails at any time, is always one-piece, serious, unconditional, and indisputable. But historically the idea of necessity is relative and variable. The principle of laughter and the

[23] Everything concerning the body (especially the genitals, buttocks, breasts, the belly, and the open mouth) becomes grandiose, enlarged, immeasurable and possible. Some examples of common images Bakhtin mentions are the pregnant, dying and deformed hag, of humans with plant and animal parts, of copulation, defecation, birth, disintegration and dismemberment.

> carnival spirit on which grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness and all pretense of an extratemporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities. For this reason great changes, even in the field of science, are always preceded by a certain carnival consciousness that prepares the way. (Bakhtin [1968] 1984:49)

Far more than a relative and anarchic display, the carnival and grotesque images act to upset solid social divisions and were a ritualized event, creating a more just and equal temporal world in direct contention (in fact, in response) with the real, ordered but unfair world. The facilitator of this metamorphosis is the fool, charged with irreverent physical displays and discursive license to mock and deride. Pryor emphasizes this integral role of the fool in creating carnival, which without, the fool would serve no larger purpose and devolve into our modern understanding of "a fool". In order to achieve the possibilities of carnival – where human consciousness, thought and imagination are freed to new potentialities, as asserted by Bakhtin – the fool's purpose must be more than an ostentatious display of antics, it must interact with the social world so that it may be transformed.

Everyday Situations

This next group of transgressive sketches makes use of parodying and rearticulating racial discourses and representations through familiar narratives, what I call *everyday situations*. The sketches that will be examined and discussed are a "going back to Africa" and a sketch on "Ward 8, where eventually everyone ends up" in *The Richard Pryor Show*, a chess game between Bill Russell and Flip Wilson in *The Flip Wilson*

Show, and a dramatized rehearsal with Ray Charles in Memphis on *Saturday Night Live* (season 3).

In a sketch examining both the cultural insularity and naiveté of whites and the efforts of American blacks to situate their cultural, racial and ethnic identities within the context of slavery and racism, Pryor plays the role of an African tour guide as he addresses his newest group of tourists. One black male of the group steps forward as Pryor announces that he has discovered that the man is originally from Cleveland. The man responds in disbelief that he already knew that. Pryor scoffs at him, wondering out loud why someone would spend $2,000 to find out something they already knew. Next, he scolds a few whites for their cultural insensitivity by conflating all Africans and brings out a "Pygmy" male and a "Watutsi" male to resolve any future mistakes. The sketch closes with another black male coming forward as Pryor hands him a folder containing the identity of his grandfather. The man, initially overcome with elation, becomes immediately disappointed to learn that his grandfather was white. Pryor shrugs his shoulders and says, "them the breaks". Admittedly, this sketch in particular, at times, straddles the fence between transgressive and ambivalent, as it does not employ direct commentary or obvious examples of rearticulation of images of blackness. Both sketches in the current section, for this reason, are more vulnerable to claims of obscured meaning. But remain full of transgressive potential primarily because of their narrative clarity regarding expertly chosen stories, making objections to racial hegemony more possible. Similarly, these sketches make use of powerful symbols of racial hegemony so that clarity in meaning and intent are bolstered by their import. Therefore, while Pryor's

"Back to Africa" sketch, on the one hand, mocks the process of rediscovery of one's roots, specifically for American blacks, on the other hand, he routinely works to lay bare the ghosts of slavery with its ignominious history of sexual violence and abuse of black females, the loss of self and identity, and promotes an Afrocentric emphasis on this nexus of loss, existential struggles of belonging, and the lived experience of racial supremacy. The style of black humor, discussed earlier regarding Moms Mabley, laughs at the painful, an extremely valid response given the magnitude of anger and rage that victims of racial oppression feel. In *Concerning Violence*, Frantz Fanon (1965), writes on the violence of colonialism and its deplorable after-effects:

> All that the native has seen in his country is that they can freely arrest him, beat him, starve him: and no professor of ethics, no priest has ever come to be beaten in his place, nor to share their bread with them. As far as the native is concerned, morality is very concrete; it is to silence the settler's defiance, to break his flaunting violence – in a word, to put him out of the picture. The well-known principle that all men are equal will be illustrated in the colonies from the moment that the native claims that he is the equal of the settler. One step more, and he is ready to fight to be more than the settler. (12)

Earlier, the psychological aspects of relief experienced by those engaging in resistance humor were discussed as a "safety valve" or a "harmless vent" that allowed for the retention of a semblance of humanity in the face of oppression (Weaver 2011). Another dimension of Pryor's brand of black humor to resistance humor is the alternate choice it provides to feelings of despair and helplessness that inevitably follow the overwhelming and defining emotional responses to racism and colonialism. Indeed, humor is used to resist, but humor is used more for the purposes of surviving the situation explored in the

sketch – of slavery, of cultural genocide, and of sexual violence. When one of the black males responds with great dismay that his grandfather is in fact white ("This is a white man!"), with a nonchalant shrug of the shoulders, Pryor's African tour guide dryly states: "Them the breaks!" In her ethnography on poor women's experiences with race, gender and sexuality in the Brazilian favelas, Donna Goldstein (2003) describes her interpretative journey regarding the ways in which the women used black humor to survive truly horrendous circumstances from alienation to a deeper understanding of the function of humor. Reflecting on this process in terms of one of the most traumatic experiences[24] (and thus more difficult to understand the use of a humorous context), Goldstein says:

> Over time, however, I was able to grasp the humor of these stories and recognize that what appeared to me to be "laughter out of place" was actually laughter quite accurately "in place". It was not that rape was something acceptable or easily dismissible to Gloria and her daughters, either. Rather, rape is an extremely serious offense, one that provokes all kinds of retaliatory violence. The rape of a child in a shantytown, for example, can provoke a gang to murder. Husbands, fathers, and brothers try to protect the bodies of their wives, daughters, and sisters, to which their own honor and reputations are tied. But while all this is true, it is also true that women are sometimes left without the protection of their male

[24] While left alone in her home with her young children, niece, and nephew, two male assailants forcefully entered the house of Gloria and raped her 14 year old daughter Anita and her 15 year old niece Claudia. Just a few feet away and trapped in the adjoining room, Gloria and her other children helplessly listened on in terror and despair to their screams. Gloria's boyfriend, Ignacio, returned home and had his watch taken from him as his verbal attempts to diffuse the situation annoyed the assailants. Before leaving, the rapists surveyed their household goods and despite seeing the relative low value of the items, proceeded to take the fan and the television, and warned them of their return in 15 minutes for the stereo, which they left by the door. The assailants did not return and Gloria, grabbing a large kitchen knife, rallied Roberto (her nephew) and Ignacio to help her pursue them, which, unfortunately, led nowhere.

> relatives or anyone at all; sometimes women find that the protection afforded by male relatives comes at its own high cost.
>
> The telling of the robbery and rape story provided a way for sexuality, violence, and female victimization to be dealt with through humor. Over time, I also found that the story became a pivotal event around which discussions revolved about the expectations women had for the men in their lives…I realized in the end, however, that these stories, aside from their humorous twists and turns, also revealed a great deal of suffering that otherwise would have remained silenced. (264-265)

In his entirely hilarious "back to Africa" sketch, Pryor accomplishes much more than comedy though and he is neither laughing *at* blacks who travel to Africa for a sense of identity and place, nor is he making fun of the existential displacement of American born blacks that is one of the many lasting effects of a society with origins in slavery. As Goldstein eventually came to see the laughter of the Brazilian women she lived with as decidedly "in place" and not "out of place", the comedy of Pryor's sketch similarly establishes the reality of a society rooted in slavery, with often disappointing steps to racial justice and equality, in the foreground. The narratives of the two men, one who finds out his grandfather is white (suggestive of the sexual violence of white men on black women) and the other whose roots only go as far as Cleveland (vestiges of cultural genocide), are made primary and relevant – they are "in place".

Just two years after this sketch aired, Pryor visited Kenya in 1979 and recounted during an interview with *Ebony Magazine* (1980) his own processes of rediscovery:

> Ebony: Some Black people were also upset about how often and how publicly you used the word "nigger."
>
> Pryor: That's over now, too.
>
> Ebony: You'll never use the word again? Why?

> Pryor: Well, I took a trip to Africa – which, by the way, is where I plan to live some day. I went to Kenya, and while I was there something inside of me said, "Look around you, Richard. What do you see?" I saw people. African people. I saw people from other countries, too, and they were all kinds of colors, but I didn't see any "niggers." I didn't see any there because there are no "niggers" in Africa. Can you imagine going out into the bush and walking up to a Masai and saying, "Hey, nigger. Come here!"? You couldn't do that because Masai are not "niggers." There are no "niggers" in Africa, and there are no "niggers" here in America either. We Black people are not "niggers," and I will forever refuse to be one. I'm free of that; it's out of my head. My mother is not a "nigger." Is yours one? So if your mama ain't no "nigger," how could you be one? See, when I went to Africa, to my Motherland, I realized that terms like "nigger" and that word "bitch" that so many Black men call our women are tricks, like genocide on the brain.
>
> Ebony: How do you respond to people who say that you used those words on stage and on your albums and got rich doing it, and now all of a sudden…
>
> Pryor: I'd say to them, "Allow me to grow." Nobody can stay the same unless he's Plastic Man. Just watch and see where my growth takes me. Maybe someday they'll say, "Look at the m-----f-----! He don't say all that s—t he used to say, yet he's still saying some funny s—t." That'll be my growth.
>
> Ebony: So we have a new Richard Pryor. Maybe we'll have to call you Richard Pryor After the Fire.
>
> Pryor: Ha, ha. A friend of mine told me he's going to start a new singing group and call it Earth, Wind & *Pryor*!

In another setting, a mental health facility, Pryor presents a snapshot of all societal archetypes that are forever stuck in their social performances and how "eventually everyone ends up in Ward 8." We see the Black Panther, a young white male who wants to be black, a white female flight attendant, a white woman who re-enacts her

acceptance at an actor's award ceremony, and an angry, poor, black single mother. Only the males in the sketch have lines containing racial discourse:

> Black Panther: It's all the white man's fault, he doesn't want to give us nothing, I'm up on his game. I don't know how to dance and I don't like basketball. I've got a plan, they've got rockets, I say we use these rockets, whitey, I'm counting down.
>
> White male: I'm tired of being white. It's boring, I want to be black, I've got the moves.

This sketch, more serious in tone, narrative, and delivery, addresses the simultaneous effects of living in a white supremacist society for both black and white males. In Ward 8, where everyone ends up (we are subject, one way or another, to hegemony), these two males confront the specific effects of race ideology. The black male, dressed like a black panther would, has gone mad experiencing racism, both the structural ("he doesn't want to give us nothing") and representationally ("I don't know how to dance and I don't like basketball."), as his discourse, laced with hints of paranoid thinking ("they've got rockets") imbues the critiques with an aching melancholy. The white male made mad by being "tired of being white" because "it's boring" desperately wants to be black. The works of David Roediger ([1991] 2003), Eric Lott ([1993] 2013), and Slavoj Zizek (1993) will help to illuminate the intricate nexus of white male desire/hatred/rejection/appropriation for black masculinity present in the discourse of the archetypal white male presented herein. As noted above in the discussion of Paul Mooney's searing and insightful critique of *The Green Mile*, the function of jouissance as the foundational sticky substance fueling nationalism and racism illuminates the desire of

the white male archetype to "be black" because he is "tired of being white." Earlier, the transgressive discourse of Paul Mooney's "Ask a Black Dude" was discussed. In the introductory sketch of "Ask a Black Dude," Mooney is asked to explain various stereotypical habits of black males:

> White male (with an Irish accent): Can black guys jump high?
>
> Mooney: Yeah black people can jump high. You gotta jump. You gotta do something when you runnin' from the police.
>
> Male (of unspecified Middle Eastern origin): I ask you, why you walk like this (imitates a stereotypical "soulful" gait of a black male)? All you…always, all you black guys, why?
>
> M: Why are you (mocking the man's accent) talking (makes indeterminate, "foreign" sounds). Black people walk like that because we have style, we have flavor, we got rhythm. I mean the black man in America is the most copied man on this planet, bar none. Everybody wanna be a nigger, but nobody wanna be a nigger. How about that for a question? Connie Chung just admitted she was a nigger, why can't the rest of you admit it too?
>
> Black male (with a West Indian accent): Why we black people like to smoke so much weed, can you tell me why?
>
> M: Well, I have a question for that nigger – well, where are your teeth, nigger? Black people like to party, they have that in their blood. And sometimes they can go real overboard, and it's real sad. And don't ask me about drugs, ask Whitney and Bobby, don't ask me.

Mooney addresses and confirms the extent of the function of black male (the other) within racist ideology that fantasizes about, consumes through appropriation, all while keeping racial hierarchy and privilege intact by stating that the "black man in America is the most copied man on this planet, bar none" and how "everybody wanna be a nigger, but nobody wanna be a nigger." While the other "Ask a Black Dude" was discussed

earlier as an example of transgressive racial discourse that succeeded in launching a powerful critique against the racist ideological narratives and representation which *The Green Mile* relies heavily on and on the generalized negative portrayal of blacks in white-dominated popular culture, the current example contains the aforementioned transgressive discourse interspersed with higher levels of ambivalence in both content and interpretation. Here, Mooney relies, to an extent, on the vestiges of the connection between race and biology ("Black people like to party, they have that in their blood." and "Black people walk like that because we have style, we have flavor, we got rhythm.") as he simultaneously conveys the tragic nature of high rates of drug abuse and race and advances sentiments of racial pride. Many have theorized about the unique positionality, character, and souls of black people[25] which is likely in line with Mooney's comments, but as argued by Weaver (2011), any amount of potential ambivalence in interpretation renders such comments exposed to racist readings.[26]

Taking into account Mooney's observation regarding the centrality of black masculinity in the construction of white masculinity, along with the contributions of Lott,

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[25] See *The Souls of Black Folk* ([1903] 1986) and *Dusk of Dawn* ([1940] 1986) by W.E.B. DuBois; *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 2008) and *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1961] 2005) by Frantz Fanon; *Ain't I A Woman?: black women and feminism* (1981) and *Black Looks* (1992) by bell hooks; and *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000) by Patricia Hill Collins.

[26] Regarding his analysis of Chris Rock's critique of perceptions of how "well" Colin Powell speaks, also discussed above, Weaver argues: "This incongruity is strengthened by the context Rock develops, and it is because of his outright mockery of white racist attitudes that the chance of reasserting the racist stereotype – or the chance of polysemic meaning – is reduced" (128).

Roediger, and Zizek, both the black and white male archetypes presented in Ward 8 in Pryor's sketch provide a critique of this construct that is both forceful and touching. His discursive and narrative emphasis on "eventually everyone ends up in Ward 8" gives Pryor's rendition nuance potentially lost in Mooney's critique of similar phenomena. The invisibility of the Indian masculine archetype to the making of hegemonic white masculinity has been explored at various points and convincingly argued by Joane Nagel (2003). And while she does consider the particular ways in which the purported hypersexuality of African males (and females) worked contemporaneously with native male masculinity to justify white supremacist violence and oppression, her sub-heading "Red Skin, White Masks," a play on Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, seems to needlessly displace the centrality of *both* indigenous and African masculinities in the complexities of the construction of dominant white masculinity. Furthermore, Takaki's (2000) cross-ethnic analysis of white attitudes toward Asians, blacks, Mexicans, and Native Americans in 19th century America, compels us to even further broaden our perspective regarding the intersecting manner in which racial ideology and hierarchy was established and solidified. As evidenced above, Nagel's focus on not only the important relevance of the constructions of indigenous women and men, but also on the centrality of gender and sexuality in early racial constructions, is, without a doubt, a necessary and significant historical and sociological contribution. Her analysis though acquires a more balanced consideration when integrated with both black male and female race theorists

and the interdisciplinary approaches such as Takaki's in ethnic studies departments.[27] In this vein, Pryor's sensitive portrayal of the trappings of operating masculinities remains focused on one aspect of the outcomes of gender norms in the context of racial ideology. While Pryor does depict white and black women and the effects of societal structure, these examples contain less discursive content and focuses more on representational and performative axes that also have lessened potential for successful critique. In particular, the black female archetype recalls the contemporary controlling image of the "welfare mother" for black women that serves to justify the practices of controlling black women's fertility, often without their consent, and along with the related controlling images, the "matriarch" and the "mammy", is a "bad mother" (Davis 1981 and Collins 2000). Collins explains:

> The image of the welfare mother provides ideological justifications for intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class. African-Americans can be racially stereotyped as being lazy by blaming Black welfare mothers for failing to pass on the work ethic. Moreover, the welfare mother has no male authority figure to assist her. Typically portrayed as an unwed mother, she violated one cardinal tenet of White, male-dominated ideology: She is a woman alone. As a result, her treatment reinforces the dominant gender ideology positing that a woman's true worth and financial security should occur through heterosexual marriage. Finally, on average, in the post-World War II political economy, one of every three African-American families has been officially classified as poor. With such high levels of Black poverty, welfare state policies supporting poor Black mothers and their children have become increasingly expensive. Creating the controlling image of the welfare mother and stigmatizing her as the cause of her own poverty and that of African-American communities shifts the angle of vision away from structural sources of poverty and blames the victims themselves. The image of the welfare mother thus provides ideological justification for the dominant group's

[27] Also discussed above are the intersectional critiques of the blind spots regarding gender, sexuality, and class of the works mentioned.

> interest in limiting the fertility of Black mothers who are seen as producing too many economically unproductive children (Davis 1981). (79-80)

The historical trajectory of the development of social welfare programs has centered on the ideal type of a heterosexual marriage and a nuclear family. At the advent of the 20th century, social policy concentrated on creating a sustainable "family wage system" wherein the husband was the sole breadwinner working outside of the home and the wife remained inside the home, in charge of domestic duties and childrearing (Cherlin 2004 and 2010). Legislation followed this cultural ideal, which always assumed that until the death of one spouse, families would always consist of a wage-earning husband and a stay-at-home wife, noted in the extension of Social Security in 1939 to include benefits to widows and their dependent children. This program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), changed throughout the 20th century, beginning as an entitlement to women with children, increasing in the 1950s to encourage mothers not to enter the workforce. But by the 1970s, mothers receiving welfare were required to enter the workforce and welfare became a culturally undesirable social status by the end of the 20th century. By 1996, welfare assistance, renamed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for low-income mothers with children was no longer a federal entitlement and a five year limit to assistance was issued, with the added discretionary power of states to shorten the time limit (Cherlin 2010). Two things are clear from this brief historical look at legislative changes to social welfare in the U.S.: 1) The definitional transition of "social welfare" from all government assistance to solely benefiting poor, black unwed

mothers wholly dependent on "welfare," cast as essentialized parasites on the rest of working America and 2) The impact of hegemonic cultural ideals regarding what constitutes a family (heterosexual married couple with children) and the gender roles assigned to men and women, worker and homemaker respectively. Although *Black Feminist Thought* was not published by Collins until 2000, given the opinion of welfare and its historical transition from an acceptable form of social welfare for white mothers, to a shameful "black woman's habit" beginning in the 1970s, the representation of the black female archetype in *The Richard Pryor Show*, airing in 1977, results in higher levels of multivocality (both the particularly difficult forms of oppression that black women experience *and* the welfare mother) that potentially confuse intent and meaning. Given the overarching perceptive discursive and representational manner of Ward 8, the sympathetic version of the black female archetype is the more likely of interpretations. While Pryor does not ignore the intersectional gender aspect of race, a full and solid representational critique would have been bolstered by the inclusion of discursive elements.

Basketball superstar Bill Russell and Flip Wilson sit down to a game of chess in a sketch exploring the racial boundaries constructed around types of cultural participation and the implicit validation of blackness generally. Both Russell and Wilson do not know how to play chess, Russell is less excited about learning the game, but Wilson excitedly informs him that Bobby Fischer just won $250,000 for being the champion in a chess competition. Russell, confused, asks Wilson whether he means Bob Foster (the current

heavyweight champion) to which Wilson flatly explains: “That is boxing and this is chess.” The following conversation ensues:

> Wilson: (reading from a rule book) In the game of chess, there are always two sides, black and white.
>
> Russell: (laughing) That means we can’t play.
>
> Wilson: They’re talking about the pieces. Now, do you want white or black?
>
> Russell: Which is better?
>
> Wilson: Neither one is better. No advantage either way.
>
> Russell: Oh okay, then I’ll be black. Because black is beautiful.
>
> Wilson: That sounds so nice. Okay. I’ll be white. Uh…white moves first.
>
> Russell: Wait a minute. I thought you said there’s no advantage.
>
> Wilson: Well, uh, moving first is not a particular advantage, suppose we went to a mine field.
>
> Russell: Oh okay, go ahead, move.

Eventually, Wilson begins making up his own rules so he can win. This only lasts so long before Russell catches on and grabs Wilson’s hand and calls “checkmate”. Wilson is confused until Russell explains that Wilson told him that checkmate is when the other player cannot move his king and glances down at Wilson’s hand clutching his king.

Several themes that provide transgressive racial discourses are present: 1) challenging and critiquing the racist dichotomies of physically oriented black male activities (basketball and boxing) and white, cerebral activities like chess; 2) the strength of the racial hierarchy (“there are always two sides, black and white”) that denies access

to blacks ("that means we can't play"); and 3) validation and valorization of blackness ("Oh okay, then I'll be black. Because black is beautiful"). James H. Cone (1998) explains in *Martin and Malcom and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* that the origins of black nationalism date back as far as the 17th century slave conspiracies and while there are important differences between the various ideological approaches over time, the central claim of all black nationalists,

> past and present, is that black people are primarily Africans and not Americans. Unlike integrationists, nationalists do not define their significance and purpose as a people by appealing to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, or even the white man's religion of Christianity. On the contrary, nationalists define their identity by their resistance to America and their determination to create a society based on their own African history and culture. The posture of rejected America and accepting Africa is sometimes symbolized with such words as "African," "black," and "blackness". For example, Martin Delany, often called the father of black nationalism, boasted that there lived "none blacker" than himself. While [Frederick] Douglass, in typical integrationist style, said, "I thank God for making me a man simply," he reported that "Delany always thanks Him for making him a black man". (9-10)

This sketch aired in 1972, at the height of the black power movement in the 1960s into the early 1970s, which presented its own particular contributions to black nationalist movements in general, often characterized in the philosophies of Malcom X. Popularly known for his searing critique of white racism, he held a special place for blacks through his ethic of self-love and self-esteem (Cone 1998 and hooks 2003). Self-love, along with the tenets of "unity", "self-knowledge", "self-defense", and "separation", formed the heart of Malcolm X's black nationalist perspective whereby blacks were encouraged to "Love each other…this is all black people need to be taught in this country because the

only ones whom we don't love are our own kind" (Cone 1998:107). Both the themes of separatism and self-love are conveyed in the exchange between Russell and Wilson (who perhaps may even be symbolic foils of then competing separatist and integrationist perspectives), although self-love achieves the clearest level of transgression as there is virtually no interpretive battle possible in Russell's "…then I'll be black. Because black is beautiful" while separatism is alluded to through semantic manipulation. Maintaining a multivocal context in the various discourses regarding black and white allows for a layered discussion of the multifaceted ways in which the black-white racial boundary operates – to convey not only relevant separatist versus integrationist debates, but also the routine denial of blacks to social, economic, political, educational, and cultural spheres of equality that relies on establishing black and white "sides". In the end, Russell, embodying the separatist perspective of the black power movement, refusing to play by Wilson's version of chess with its makeshift rules, manages to outsmart Wilson by rearticulating the meaning of checkmate. The integration of the mind/body split of racist ideology is also remade as Russell wields both intellectual and physical prowess as he enforces his reinterpretation of the rules of chess by grasping the arm holding Wilson's king piece.

Ray Charles, as the guest host and special musical guest on season 3 of *Saturday Night Live*, plays himself in a sketch discussing some "adaptations to his work" by the "Young Caucasians" with his agent (Garrett Morris) in a Memphis rehearsal hall in 1957. Sitting at a piano, Charles is less than enthused but his agent convinces him to give the musical group and their changes a chance. A boisterous group of white females and

males (Jane Curtin, Lorraine Newman, Gilda Radner, Dan Akroyd, John Belushi, and Bill Murray) enter dressed in matching tan and plaid sweater vests, pleated skirts for the women, and slacks for the men, singing *What'd You Say?* while dancing in contrived and coordinated dance movements. The agent praises them, as one of the singers asks Charles what he really thinks. As he is about to answer, the agent interrupts him, visibly nervous of his reply. Another singer (Jane Curtin) chimes in how his song about his Ma and Pa in Arkansas made her wonder if her Ma knew his Pa and Charles responds by non-verbally showing his disapproval at her naiveté believing that his black father would know, as equals, her white mother. The sketch comes to its conclusion as the Young Caucasians leave when Charles states his preference for his own version, which he subsequently performs. Alone, the agent reasons how white people just are not ready for it to Charles, and now, the pair, no longer in contention, both agree to grab a bite to eat and exit.

The uncertainty in interpretation of Morris's character, the fast-talking black agent, who at the outset seems to be encouraging Charles's consent in the cultural appropriation of his music by the white music industry, represented by the "Young Caucasians". But the narrative supports a more positive interpretation of Charles's fictional agent, who demonstrates the kind of facility required of blacks in the music industry (from agent to artist) within a white dominated culture industry that routinely devalues and demonizes black cultural expressions only to appropriate these forms into mainstream white popular culture. Rather than exploding in frustration or anger with Charles over his refusal to "mainstream" his music, Morris's character affirms the already strong black male perspective of the sketch in general, when he ultimately places

the blame on whites for their cultural myopia. This kind of multi-dimensional, nuanced, and complicated character with depth and his own narrative arc is not typical of the characters Morris played in season 3 of SNL. In fact, this character is the only balanced, substantive role that Morris played for the entirety of the season. As discussed in Chapter 3, Morris's narrative and representational function mainly served to reinforce the superiority of characters played by John Belushi, the show's embodiment of white hegemonic masculinity and to exploit our misplaced societal fascination with black male bodies, masculinity, and sexuality by regularly, without any narrative necessity, having Morris bare his chest. It is also no surprise that this coincided with Charles's guest spot on the show and that the only other successfully transgressive sketch of *Saturday Night Live* (both of season 3 and of the show across decades) was authored and enacted by another black male, Chris Rock. This stark pattern suggests that even "white" shows are capable of writing, conceptualizing, and performing the comedic parts of transgressive racial narratives without engaging in racial performance or mimicry and maintaining comedic viability, when non-white perspectives are not only included, but valued and privileged. Rock still remains an excellent example of transgressive discourse on a show that either reinforces racial hegemony or creates more ambivalence regarding racism, but the current example conveys the integration of transgressive racial discourses and representations into a form that does not rely solely on rhetorical clarity. Thus avoiding a closure of meaning of "That's how black people think," which is easily possible in forms like stand-up, to multivocality, the generation of polysemy holds less tyranny over meaning since many progressive rearticulations are now possible. Moving away from the

defensive position of us versus them, this narrative, representation, and characterization leads to a more holistic "That's how racism works" or encouraging the self-reflective "Do we ruin and exploit black music?" for whites while simultaneously validating both the experiences of alienation, powerlessness, and frustration of black artists existing in an exploitative culture industry dominated by whiteness and the existence of supportive black solidarity. Both Rock and Charles convey strong black perspectives that lead to reinterpretation and rearticulation, but perhaps Rock, a cast member, unlike the more influential position of guest host, was given limited and intermittent opportunities to produce a diversity of racially transgressive material. Clearly though, the access to active contributions to the writing and conceptualization processes was more permissible in the 1990s than the 1970s. Although, this indisputable trend is tempered considering the blatant ways characters Morris played supported and justified racist ideology and the exceedingly low rate of appearance for Rock (1.5% of all sketches during season 16 included appearances by Rock, n=180 sketches) compared to Morris's appearances in sketches 38.2% (n=238 sketches) of the time during season 3. This trend is also supported by the statistically significant relationship, discussed in Chapter 3, between the racial proportion of characters and racial discourse; similarly, the statistical relationship is contextualized by the interpretative analysis displaying how the racial diversity on various planes (casting, guest hosts, writers, and producers) is directly related to transgressive potential.

CHAPTER 5
AUDIENCE RECEPTION OF CHAPPELLE'S SHOW

The general critics of interpretative analysis and especially interpretative analysis of texts challenge findings arguing that they miss important narrative trends obtained from audience reception research. The following data and analysis concentrates on two sketches, *Blind Supremacy* and *The Mad Real World*, on *Chappelle's Show* (*Blind Supremacy* was discussed earlier in the previous chapter as an example of a transgressive sketch). While only a few focus groups were conducted, they function as a platform to discuss nascent narrative trends and findings. The results suggest a strong tendency of participants to situate and negotiate their laughter. Distinctive discursive forms of negotiation are examined herein along racial and gender lines, both in terms of the race and gender of the participant and the racial and gender proportion of the focus group population.

The three overarching themes that will be explored are the meaning of laughter to the racial representations in *Chappelle's Show*, musings regarding how these representations are reproduced in reality and controversy over the use of the "N word". Participants navigating through recollections of their humorous responses considered, through different narrative trajectories, the significance of their laughter. Resistance to and identification with these racial representations led to both hegemonic and oppositional readings, all of them demonstrating the palpable function of heteroglossia in consumption of this visual text. The first section discusses how participants articulate the

different reasons white participants laugh, the second explores how black participants temper their laughter by deploring the reproduction and consequences of negative images of blacks on television, and in the last section, participants weigh in on the usage of the "N word" and where, if any, boundaries of acceptability are erected.

"I Laugh Because I Know"

One overall trend was the uneasiness and difficulty engaging in dialogue by both male and female white participants, which is contrasted to the unabashed and lively responses of black participants. But most participants struggled with consensus regarding deciding whether the content of was in fact actually comedic or not. Many of them pointed to underscoring the presence of irony as a deciding factor whether they found the content humorous. The issue of exaggeration as a technique of social critique of stereotyping by Chappelle was frequently raised, often used as justification for a certain type of laughter. Also important was the insistence on cognitive recognition of which representations were being rejected; not all messages were being equally consumed.

Some white participants explained their laughter through a firm rejection of a very particular representation of whites and underscoring a deep understanding of *Chappelle's* critique of white racist logic. In essence, the exaggeration, they felt, validated even sensitive issues like white supremacy (explored in *Blind Supremacy)* because of their absurdity as the following exchange illustrates:

> Sabrina: I think the funniest parts of that [*Blind Supremacy*] are like some of the things he says as a white supremacist and like it's not funny because

> I hold them to be true, but funny because it's so [emphasis] ridiculous. [Brad and Lindsay nod in agreement]
>
> Sabrina: Like someone thinks that's true, it's just so outrageous that hold those kinds of beliefs about stereotypes to be true.

Not identifying with a particular *type* of whiteness was important in justifying their laughter in this particular white focus group. Those whites were positioned as what the participants identified as the *redneck* stereotype that while they did find some truth in, firmly did not resonate with how they viewed both their own opinions of blacks – in this way, it was important for them to create a strict social distance between those types of whites and other, more well-adjusted whites. Here we can witness an alternate application of "double consciousness", although not as intended by DuBois, these white participants exhibit consciousness of how Chappelle (and other racial minorities) understand *those* whites – they are cognizant of how these whites are understood and disassociate themselves from that particular representation. The whites portrayed by Chappelle were typically seen as an aberration, something that existed, but was definitely not representative. When probed about this particular stereotype of whites, they said:

> Lindsay: You know I've spent time in the South, and just like that whole thing's just like I feel I've seen stuff like that before and so like the shock value isn't there for me, like I haven't seen like Ku Klux Klan rally, but like I've seen the rednecks and I've seen the white supremacists, it just isn't, for anything it's more I feel like I'm rallying more on the Dave Chappelle side than like the white people side. [JK: So you agreed with his portrayal of those subset of whites?]
>
> Lindsay: Yeah. They're just like so ridiculous that there are people that feel so adamantly about different people of their skin color.

> Brad: I grew up in the country and it's definitely, I learned more about racism and stereotypes there than I did here. [JK: Where are you from?]
>
> Brad: Cooperstown, about an hour away from here. I'm surrounded by farms and things like that. And I live here, and I'm surrounded by all different cultures and diversities and then you go home and all of a sudden, and I heard white people say the "N word" and I'm like, "Where did this come from?" I guess you guys got a smaller consciousness not in the city. The redneck is a stereotype but I mean I know my one friend was this "emo" thing but now all of sudden he wants to be the country redneck guy, so now he wears flannel and hunting orange hats and drives a pick-up truck and does all these things to become a redneck. You're not a real redneck you're just doing all these things to try and look like one.

Of course apparent in this exchange between Brad and Lindsay is both the confirmation of and resistance to identification with the redneck stereotype, but an interesting thing I noticed was the conflation with redneck and the ambiguously described geographic area of the "south." In fact Chappelle does not specifically locate the geographic location of *Blind Supremacy*, but these participants (as long as all the other participants) conflated racist whites with the "south." Lindsay, who is from the Philadelphia area, expressed such a vehement disgust and hatred for the whites she encountered while spending a few years in college in North Carolina before moving back home, and as she put it was "rallying more on the Dave Chappelle side than like the white people side." Brad also placed importance in this type of distancing in recounting his high school experience. While Brad did not conflate the redneck stereotype with the South, it was important for him to highlight how different he was from everyone else in his town. There is present here a splintering off of racial identification, these participants are employing a sort of "social consciousness" barometer to what kind of whites they are – they *knowingly*

construct their identity in opposition to the redneck stereotype and assert an insider's knowledge regarding past and current racist policies and opinions. This is important in validating their humorous reading of this sketch, despite its extreme content. For them, they are laughing along with Chappelle, finding it impossible that people ever held those particular racist ideas or beliefs about blacks.

"I Laugh Because I'm Justified"

Whites in the other all-white focus group did necessarily assume a similar positioning against racist whites as above, but had different reasons for still finding it humorous. Bethany put it bluntly, "It's just funny. As much as like the people who find it offensive, I mean [pauses] it's either one or the other. You find it offensive, or you find it funny." She never elaborated, without prodding, why she thought her reaction was justified. But the dividing line between those that laugh and those that do not was clear for her – exactly where or how that line was drawn she had difficulty defining or explaining but instead launched into her distinction between "real" and "soft" racism. For her and Mike, who joined in at this point in the conversation, "real" racism was defined by stark structural racism (Bethany pointed to slavery) or obviously segregation-seeking behavior by whites. Unlike the other white participants who examined their laughter in the context of resistance to rednecks, these participants navigated their humorous response by recognition of racism, while validating certain forms of "soft" racism. Bethany describes "soft" racism by illustrating the following story:

Bethany: My, my um, my boyfriend, I tell people that he's racist 'cause he really is. Like it just affects me because I'm not racist at all. But we'll be at the mall and like you know, you know how like, I don't know if you guys have had this experience, but like whenever we're in the mall and like it's crowded, like there's always group of black girls that'll just like run into you and just like, and try to squeeze in between you but they won't try to like make it so they're not going to hit you and they just run into you and he always gets like you know an elbow or something or like he'll be looking at something and some black girl will jump right in front of him and he's just like, he uses the "N word" and he's half Hispanic and he will still say "spic". And that, he doesn't, his father was Hispanic and his mother was like French or something. You can't tell, like he's pale, pale as you can get. But he's like my roommate's Hispanic and she's very wild and he can't stand it…a lot of the girls on my floor are black and they're very loud, I admit, they're very loud and it doesn't bother me just 'cause I'm used to it. And sometimes I'll join them and other times I'll just like put my covers over my head and ignore it. And I guess, after he would see a skit like that, and laugh at it, he wouldn't go out and kill someone, or think that's okay, I think that's soft racism, what my boyfriend is.

Bethany: Just because I have an opinion, doesn't mean you're racist. Like I can say that black people are loud 'cause in my opinion they really are, but I'm friends with all of the girls on my floor and if they go out on a Friday night and I don't have anything to do, I'll go with them, I'll be the only white girl, and I'll go out with them. And you know we have a good time, and I don't like, I don't think of it as weird although when we go to a club when I'm the only white person out of like 100 then it gets kind of awkward, but, I mean other than that, it doesn't really matter.

Mike: I don't know, I just mean like, have you ever seen *Crash*, it's like the crisis situation, that's like the whole, kind of like the racism, like I felt like Michael Richards[28] was like in a crisis situation and he just like lost control.

[28] Mike is referring to a violently delivered racist and profane tirade by Richards during his stand-up routine (in November 2006) at *Laugh,* a West Hollywood comedy club, toward a group of African Americans in the audience when they playfully heckled him from the balcony.

This validation of their opinions was a constant theme throughout the focus group of these particular white participants. Both Bethany and Mike articulated this difference between types of racism, some opinions and beliefs that *justified* by their own experiences, or what Mike expressed as situations in which whites may "lose control" – this was paramount to them. Bethany used her personal friendships and social saturation with her black female friends as a type of softening of what might be perceived as "racist" opinions. Although, neither of them dropped the word "racism" in describing either the beliefs held by themselves, or by their peers. Embedded in their statements is a spectator resistance, akin to Diawara's conceptualization of Black spectator resistance, to what they interpret as an unfair representation of whites. Not an unfair representation of rednecks, but of whites that might share similar negative opinions of blacks that does not translate into action or behavior. While the whites in the other focus group tended to circulate their discussion within the confines of the sketch and especially in opposition to a certain type of racism expressed by whites not shared by their own beliefs, Bethany and Mike frequently used the sketch as a springboard to discuss its validity with reality.

"I Have Anxiety about My Laughter"

Whites in the mixed focus group (it is important to note again that this focus group had two white females and one white male and one black female) expressed reluctance, or questioning of their initial laughter. This was in response to both of the clips, much later in the focus groups, after all of the people in the focus group agreed finding the clips funny. While not in outright rejection of their initial response, by the end

of our discussion, they interrogated what their laughter meant; they were scared of how it might be interpreted.

> Lana: For me personally, I found it very uncomfortable to laugh because there are parts that you do want to laugh, but at the same time you feel like, "Should I? Should I not? Am I agreeing with him you know, the sketch itself?"
>
> Jackie: I definitely understand that hesitation to laugh, because it's like "What does it mean? What does it mean about me by laughing?" and but I think that the reason why it's funny is because…it's true but you don't feel like it's the truth [emphasis]. You laugh because you see it as the ridiculousness that it is, but and I think that this kind of comedy in the one sense can address issues in a sense that people can relate to but it's also very easily misinterpreted. And so I think in some cases by laughing, you're laughing because you see [emphasis] what he's actually trying to say and you appreciate it because it's not what you feel, but that's, it's a risky, thin line.

Here Jackie expresses in somewhat of a similar form the whites who "laughed because they knew", but her worry both about the meaning of her laughter and the larger implications of it are an added layer. She also is pointing to the absurdity of racism and stereotyping that Chappelle critiques as reason for her laughter, but the *anxiety* of it meaning something more, or something that is unconscious, or out of her control is a real fear of hers and Lana's. Here we can see the function of Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia*, the complicated and messy context that the content of a text enters and at times clashes with. Not only are multiple and contradictory readings possible for different readers, but even for the same readers, after deliberation, or in a shifting contextual surrounding. Unlike Bethany, justifiable laughter on the basis of visceral reaction is not sufficient. The reading of this sketch and the response *means* something to these

participants, and in the case as demonstrated earlier in Lindsay and Brad, becomes an important marker of separation from racist whites.

Trisha, the black female in this mixed focus group also examined her humorous reaction to the *Blind Supremacy* sketch, admitting her laughter, but at the same time noting the inherent hurtfulness of the discussion of such stereotypes:

> Trisha: When he's describing blacks, blacks are dirty, blacks big nose, breathing up all the white air, blacks big butts, like all the little stereotypes that I'm used to hearing that would categorize myself to thinking "Oh they're talking about a black person." Like those stereotypes were quite funny but at the same time, was like Okay, alright, okay, stop, okay, it's enough already.

Given her personal exposure to these stereotypes, she cannot help but reject, or express disdain for both her response and the fact that such experiences are used for comedic effect. While similar to the whites in her group, Trisha's anxiety manifests itself as resentful amusement – her hesitation is specifically located in her position as identification with the subject position, while situated ironically, it inevitably recalls with painful veracity her real lived experience. She expanded on this sentiment when encountering these sketches to the general state of comedy. She says:

> Trisha: It's just the fact that Dave Chappelle, like the African American society they find it, they use it as joke now this time of whites and blacks that whole issue and they seem to play on it, and they continue to use it in their comedy and their stories. Oh yeah, any way that they can, this was pretty, it wasn't funny but it was quite like, back in thinking a black guy can really be supporting the other kind when it's the color that he's not, and it was just, it was, it was amusing, but it wasn't, 'cause ignorant things he was saying about the minorities, either being white, black, Asian, or whatever you are, it's just. It was funny but it was ignorant I think that's comedy today, it has a lot of ignorant comments, no matter what color you

> are, because you can be a white comedian go up and say something and he can talk about black, but it's funny, but it's still ignorant at the same time.

Here there is a near invisible line between the offensive and the humorous, which to her is evident in all types of comedy today. Also in her statement is the lack of emphasis on the race or identification with the race of the performer and more emphasis on content. For Trisha, an ignorant comment remains ignorant, despite its effectiveness in generating laughter, in any situation, for any one person – it is off limits.

Judging Representation: "What If People Think This Is True?"

While the black female participants in the all-black focus group also expressed multiple layers of offense, laughter and sensitivity to the sketches, they located a particular reason for their discomfort, which was the fear of perpetuation or instillation of these beliefs or attitudes as truth and not a social critique, or as a presentation of absurdity. This was another theme that emerged in their group regarding representation of blacks.

> Malika: I mean it's, you know he's poking fun at like the stereotype and generalization but at the same time, some of it's like I mean, there's some people that watch that, you know like, they laugh at it. I know a lot of people that used to watch it and laugh at it and they kind of thought that's how…Caucasian people thought "You know, oh well, yeah, he said, he's talking about real life [emphasis] and I'm like yeah, that's not the whole population. I've heard them say like oh you know da-da-da-da-da, "Is that how you guys act?" And I'm like no.

Malika expresses both a potential and realized fear that all of the black participants (including Trisha) regarding the reproduction of television images as reality for whites.

As observed above, while she verbalizes cognition of the humorous intent of the sketches, the presence of doubt and hesitation of the then real-life outcomes is doubly important in her reading. Implicit in her statement is the skepticism of a correct interpretation of the presentation of blacks. What she articulates is the tenuous relationship of projection of meaning visually and the consequences of both interpretation and the form the messages take thereafter. Heteroglossia in a comic context is particularly pronounced, since endemic to this format is the deliberately flexible boundaries and ambiguity – the absolute absence of a commonly understood (and thus interpreted) language is fundamental (Bakhtin 1981). The humor she may admit to experiencing is in essence secondary to the potentiality of perpetuation of prejudice and racist attitudes and beliefs. Amanda adds to Malika's comment by recounting an actual experience of the transformation of such circulated stereotypes of blacks:

> Amanda: You also hear the audience laughing in the background and it makes it seem more natural. I don't know…To kind of continue actually my cousin and I were going out to eat and an older white male was coming out of the restaurant and well, we were leaving and he was going in…[JK: Where was this?]
>
> Amanda: I believe it was Old Country Buffet, so we were going…[JK: In this suburbs then?]
>
> Amanda: Yeah. We were coming out and he was going in and he said, "Well I hope there's some more chicken left, I know how you guys like chicken." And we didn't really catch on to it until he disappeared, did he just say that [laughter of other participants]. [JK: Was he smiling when he said that?]
>
> Amanda: Yeah, he thought it was funny, that kind of bases off of Dave Chappelle because uses that like black people always eat chicken, black people lazy, just like the stereotypes, then like for people to actually see

> that, like they say they think it's true. I can laugh at it, but then in the back of my mind say "that's not right."

There are a few things that Amanda points to in her discussion of her experience. First, she directly links the types of stereotypes presented on *Chappelle's Show* as responsible for creating the kind of encounter she had; the putatively negative "symbolic vehicle of meaning" that this man extrapolated from popular culture images (Wright 1977). While earlier participants speculated about how these messages might be consumed, Amanda locates a direct link between them, even though she has no knowledge whether the white person in her story has ever seen *Chappelle's Show*. Instead of the directionality of earlier discussions of stereotyping producing action or belief, Amanda is demonstrating how such media texts can in fact justify past experiences. She also discusses the function of hearing the audience laughter in the background might affect a person's perception of what they are viewing. It is hard to say whether this would have an effect on reactions to these particular sketches, especially since a lot of sitcoms employ this similar inclusion of audience laughter in the background. But I still think it is noteworthy of inclusion, since this kind of close interrogation of the "packaging" of these messages was something that was particular to this focus group.

The intersection of reality and reality as representation in these sketches was also a theme that manifested itself among white respondents. Some of them expressed a somewhat similar type of fear over reproduction of negative representations of blacks as black participants, while others responded to situations within the sketches by telling stories from their lives that, to them, mirrored the situations that Chappelle presented.

The following quote illustrates how some of the white participants felt regarding their desire for a more structured "guide" to viewing these sketches – something more explicit in order to avoid the potential mis-reading of the ironic intent of the sketches:

> Brad: I thought the general message was just trying to point out stereotypes, just that they exist and here are some of them and this is what people think and I don't really see him going against, I mean he's just showing people acting as racist and things like that, he's not really showing the opposite end, or showing don't say, or don't do this I guess he does that when he actually talks after the skits, but he's really just throwing out these are stereotypes, these are racist, racist thinking. I kind of wish he would do more about like not, well this is wrong. Because it really is, *The Mad Real World*, really what it is, is black people acting like white supremacists think that all black people act. He doesn't show anything to make you think otherwise.

Brad is someone who, as discussed earlier, has constructed his identity as counter to Chappelle's presentation of racist logic of some whites but his experience with such whites from his hometown compounds his doubt that everyone viewing these sketches will properly read the sketches. The other white participants expressed a similar fear, although Lindsay underscored how it was unbelievable to her that someone could not see the embedded irony or absurdity of these stereotypes.

In another vein, other white participants, after viewing both sketches, aligned a lot of their own experiences with what they interpreted from the sketches. In a way, it is Amanda's fear coming to fruition – the propagation and solidification of past behavior, inevitably reinforcing future attitudes. These white participants directly related events in their life, or opinions they had and used this content as confirmation of what they had

experienced. Mike expounded on his reaction to *The Mad Real World* segment as "painful to watch" by saying:

> JK: So what in the sketch, in *The Mad Real World* what things happened that were kind of painful to watch?
>
> Mike: I had the same experience because my roommate the first semester was African American. There's just some things I didn't get, I guess I didn't really understand why he…I mean he seemed like he was a hard worker and stuff, but like he always wanted the seat down, so like when he said in the skit, "When you go to the bathroom, you put the seat down. You sit down when you pee." It reminded me of the situation, it wasn't really the same, but that and like he would always listen to music really loud and the songs like he listened to I'd hear them being played loudly in cars, mainstream stuff. I didn't get it.
>
> Mike: Just like how loud they can be. And the standing up, the pissing thing. That was like the closest thing. But and like, he, I mean, I guess I was only, it just reminded because that was like pretty much the situation.

And later in the same focus group, Bethany, in response to Mike's mention of the stereotypical Black character, Lysol, who had just been released from jail (also in *The Mad Real World*):

> Bethany: They come up with the most retarded names. I can't tell you how many times I've been out to a club and some guy gave me his, I mean he got my number and then text me and I'll be like "Who is this?" And he gave me some like ridiculous name that's always like an adjective. Like they have to name themselves some kind of adjective or they can't, they have to describe themselves. [JK: So that's not a stereotype, you're saying that that really happens?]
>
> Bethany: Oh yes. All the time. Like maybe white people do it too, not that I [emphasis] know I know of I mean, it's just like black people give themselves retarded names. They're not born, I'm sure mothers know how to name their kids, you would just never know, because they come up with these ridiculous names.

Both of these illustrations do not, admittedly by these participants themselves, sync up neatly with the portrayal of blacks in the sketches, but the gravity of such reasoned incongruity is the fact that it persisted despite even a self-admittance of contradiction. Mike begins his statement with directly comparing his negative rooming experience with a black student by saying "I had the *same* experience," but by the end of his story he admits that it was not really the same, but that it only recalled that memory. Regardless of this, the connection between the two is persistent, as he continues with this same comparison at another point in the focus group. Bethany constructs her answer a bit differently, reasoning with a kind of slanted knowledge that she has acquired through observation.

The issue of stereotyping and what actually constituted the practice was obviously a central point of the discussion of all of the groups. Although some of the participants, like Bethany and Mike, upheld some stereotypes they had of blacks, the general consensus across the groups when asked to define a stereotype typically concluded that stereotyping was a negative and harmful phenomenon. Most of the time, discussion circulated around whether a distinction "positive" and "negative" stereotypes existed; in the end, all four groups agreed that the act of stereotyping as reduction of a group to a strict set of traits, or the blind application of these traits to any group is ultimately used as a vehicle creating harmful dichotomies. While the mythic "positive" stereotype was concluded by the groups not to exists, some of the ones they considered were "Asians are smart" or "Asians are good at math" and "blacks are good dancers" or "blacks are good basketball players." The possibility of good stereotypes arose in all the groups, with

much debate among the participants over this issue, but ultimately, the logic of stereotyping was critiqued in any form:

> Amanda: In a way it's good, like we think that they're smart, but it's still bad because it's a stereotype. And you have some Asians that aren't [emphasis] smart. So in a way it's good, because you're promoting someone, like they're smart, but at the same time, you're still stereotyping someone, just because you're of a certain race, you're this way.
>
> Lindsay: But I think those ["positive" stereotypes] are manipulated, I don't know, I see stereotypes as a negative thing, like you can say oh black people are good at dancing, but you're like oh, I don't know, then you turn it on yourself, oh I'm so white [laughs], then it turns into like "Oh I'm so white I can't dance," like it turns, if it's positive on one end, it's going to be negative for the other.

Lindsay and Amanda, present in separate focus groups, advanced similar arguments to their respective groups resulting in a slight shift in the discussion of stereotyping. While some of the participants admitted to stereotyping every day, they also admitted that it was an unsightly behavior that they were ashamed of. It was an unavoidable phenomenon – something that they actively practiced among their close circle of friends and in ways that they were not always cognizant of until it was countered by concrete evidence to the contrary.

Interrogation of the "N Word"

Another frequently explored subject was the participants' reaction to the use of the "N word" in both of the sketches. The use of the racial slur is used excessively in both *Blind Supremacy* and *The Mad Real World.* It functioned quite differently with the content of the word shifting to represent wholly racist and hateful contexts by whites to a

demonstration of its usage among exclusively black social spaces, respectively. Participants were particularly responsive to a scene in *Blind Supremacy* depicting a car occupied by young white males listening to ambiguously categorized "hip hop" music, reacting wildly satisfied to Chappelle's character Clayton Bigsby shouting the "N word" as his car pulled up beside theirs. The young male White characters responded with delight and satisfaction that they were called the "N word" by a black male. A dominant opinion among black participants was an acceptance of the usage of the epithet within all black social environments, but what remained after much discussion was the below illustrated consensus:

> Malika: Yeah, everybody's equal, so the use of a word shouldn't be offensive but you can't take that with the years of offense and say "it's not offensive anymore." If you're going to do that that way, then there should be elimination of some words. They're just off limits. Because there's just too much that goes with those.

Malika is expressing her skepticism at the existence of a colorblind society which postulates equality, hypothetically negating the power of such racial epithets (Omi and Winant 1994 and Bonilla-Silva 2003). She, along with other black participants, wholeheartedly rejects this notion – some words are never to be used not only in light of continued structural and relational racism and discrimination, but also because of the continued historical pain attached to its public usage. Even though Malika, at other points in the focus group, admitted to using the word and accepting its usage on limited terms, she and other black participants wholeheartedly agreed that they were offended when whites used it and in this case would rather opt for a total erasure of the word. Also

expressed in the white, black and the mixed focus groups was the observed desire of others outside of the black community claiming usage of the word, as a sign of either status, or as evidence of wanting to belong to what was identified as the "hip hop" culture:

> Lana: I thought it was really interesting how he had the two white guys in the car [talking about *Blind Supremacy*] when he calls them the "N word" and they think it's really funny, I mean and it's the idea that the entertainment industry has made the "N word" just another word so it's in one way, you're not allowed to say it, but in another way it's okay. And I think coming from a lot of whites, they're not really sure where the line is drawn. What happens when you go to a Jay-Z concert, what happens when you go to these places where the word is commonly said? So yet we make it look at it okay, the African American can say it and that's fine, and that's one of, greeting this is who I am, if it's taken out of context, it's all of a sudden racism so there's this line, whereas in another two white guys want to be able to say it and they think it's really cool that somebody else is calling them that.

In another version of discussing the usage of the word by whites, Trisha (black female participant in the mixed group) inquired of the white participants how they felt about racial slurs for whites, in her attempt to demonstrate relationally to them the gravity of agony and anguish that the "N word" evokes.

> Trisha: With the um, the white kids and he saying the word nigger, like no matter how much African American society can say that the nigger word isn't hurtful, it is hurtful even though you might not have encountered the things that caused that word to be so powerful and someone else being able to say that word I still think that it's hurtful. Not hurtful, but it's like okay, because, in my environment, we use nigga and when we say nigger that's like, that's like saying cracker. That's very, not a good word right [speaking to the group]? [laughter of group]
>
> Tim: I don't think it really holds that much weight anymore.

Tim expresses what all the other white participants non-verbally (by laughing or nodding their heads) supported – immunity to a perniciously emotive reaction. The participants knew the negative connotations of cracker but the ease of rejecting being forcibly placed in that category was apparent. Initially when Trisha tried to relate this sentiment to the whites in the focus group with her, she was met with laughter, or dismissal, even by Jackie who only seemed to remember the incident she describes after Tim verbalizes the absolution of its gravity.

> Jackie: I didn't actually, it's actually interesting, when I lived at Oxford street, and I was walking to class one day and there were some, all my neighbors are African American and there were some my age sitting on their porch and I walked by and they said there goes a cracker. And like that was the first time anybody had ever said that to me, and at first like, I just kind of laughed and I sat there and that's a bunch of bullshit, I don't understand and I kind of appreciated having that experience because I think it's good to know that, not that I would ever turn table and do that myself, but like that, so yeah, and then I actually learned what it meant and then I got really offended.

Jackie's genuine offense to being called a racial slur is undeniable in this excerpt, as well as during the focus group. It was clear this was an unusual and shocking occurrence in her life as the story unfolded. But Jackie was not even cognizant of the pejorative intent of this word, while Trisha and the other black participants face the inescapable knowledge of what the "N word" means. There is no confusion. Trisha expresses the sentiment of all of the other black participants in saying that despite the efforts toward reclamation of the "N word," she does not ever feel as if they sting of it can be softened. In all these various formulations, what was constant were the relationship between the

legitimacy of usage and racial identity; although, in the end the choice between dissolution and misuse of the word was not in question for the black participants.

The Mad Real World was less the focus of the participants than *Blind Supremacy* which was more regularly confronted and situated by black, white, female, and male participants. It is notable that the two of the three direct references to *The Mad Real World*, regarding the name of Lysol, Tyree's (Charlie Murphy) recently released from prison friend and a comment made by Tyree, was to indisputably confirm several racist stereotypes and beliefs held by Bethany, a white female participant:

> Bethany: They come up with the most retarded names. I can't tell you how many times I've been out to a club and some guy gave me his, I mean he got my number and then text me and I'll be like "Who is this?" And he gave me some like ridiculous name that's always like an adjective. Like they have to name themselves some kind of adjective or they can't, they have to describe themselves. [JK: So that's not a stereotype, you're saying that that really happens?]
>
> Bethany: Oh yes. All the time. Like maybe white people do it too, not that I [emphasis] know I know of I mean, it's just like black people give themselves retarded names. They're not born, I'm sure mothers know how to name their kids, you would just never know, because they come up with these ridiculous names.

Mike, a white male participant in the same all-white focus group also expressed the confirmation of stereotypical behavior vis-à-vis the characterization of Tyree, one of the black male characters in the Mad Real World house, of his former black male roommate:

> JK: So what in the sketch, in *The Mad Real World*, what things happened that were kind of painful to watch?
>
> Mike: I had the same experience because my roommate the first semester was African American. There's just some things I didn't get, I guess I didn't really understand why he…I mean he seemed like he was a hard

> worker and stuff, but like he always wanted the seat down, so like when he said in the skit, "When you go to the bathroom, you put the seat down. You sit down when you pee." It reminded me of the situation, it wasn't really the same, but that and like he would always listen to music really loud and the songs like he listened to I'd hear them being played loudly in cars, mainstream stuff. I didn't get it.
>
> Mike: Just like how loud they can be. And the standing up, the pissing thing. That was like the closest thing. But and like, he, I mean, I guess I was only, it just reminded because that was like pretty much the situation.

Bethany does not acknowledge the manner in which Chappelle tried to use hyperbole and exaggeration to reinterpret past portrayals of singular black characters on MTV's reality show *The Real World* having emotional, often angry, breakdowns as the result of and instead reads the stereotypical portrayals of blacks as reflecting, not only her personal experiences, but of behavior typical of blacks. In his introduction to the sketch, he admits his love for reality television, in particular "The Real World," and how something about the show just "moves" him. He expresses though aspects of the show that displease him:

> One of the things that I don't like about the show, is that every few years, they put a black guy on the show and try and make him look crazy. Like he'll freak out. But it's like, of course he's going to freak out, you put him around 6 of the craziest white people you can find and then expect them to live a normal life. They would not like it if we made a show where we put one white guy around 6 of the craziest black people we could find, would they?!

On *The Mad Real World* five blacks room with a white male (characters: Zondra, Tyree, Tron, Lisa, Faze, and Chad) and mayhem ensues. The black housemates shirk their work and play dice in the alley, while Chad tries to work diligently, have loud parties until early in the morning, three of the men sleep with his girlfriend Katie and film it, Tyree

stabs his father, prison shiv style (because he looked at Zondra the "wrong way"). Eventually Chad blows up at them asking them to be quiet, so the rest of the house votes that Chad leave, because they "don't feel safe with him in the house." There's also the implication that Chad was raped by either Tyree or Lysol, or both after he was knocked out during the choke hold they had him in (Chad complains of how much his "ass hurt" during reflection). The "craziest" black people are indeed pathological, aggressive and violent, intimidating and emotionally and psychologically unstable in Chappelle's reversal, drawing extensively from severely racist portrayals of black men and women: the always angry, paranoid, and loud black female; the black male recently out of prison; the black males who steal white women away from their loving and gentle white boyfriends enticing them with their superior sexual capabilities (which also includes acts of sexual "degeneracy"); excessive drug and alcohol use partying, and gambling; the fearsome black male who murders white men without remorse; and the overall unwillingness to work. Without his introduction, the transgressive potential of "The Mad Real World" to challenge the construction of blackness on television and a full cadre of negative controlling images to deride becomes extremely vulnerable to the reinforcement of racist ideology, as evidenced in Bethany's interpretation. Her racist judgments are also not confined to the content examined in the sketch, but extends her reach to the familiar location of the perceived failures of the black community on black females, specifically, black mothers. She reasons how "[t]hey're not born [that way], I'm sure mothers ["normal," white mothers] know how to name their kids, you would just never know, because they [black mothers] come up with these ridiculous names." If black people are

not born that way, they are made so by black mothers who, from the earliest choice – their names – are responsible for their failings and degeneracy. Mike also confirms his self-admittedly inaccurate stereotypical and racist interpretations of his former black roommate's behaviors. It is entirely possible that his roommate preferred to have the toilet seat down due to issues related to hygiene, aesthetics (a covered toilet seat is much more pleasing to look at), or perhaps because he had female influences that expressed their displeasure at constantly having to put the toilet seat down. Presumably, Tyree's admonition to Chad to sit when he pees is more a reference to the character's familiarity with experiences of incarceration and the related reference to sexual violence that occurs in penitentiaries. Already noting how "it really wasn't the same" does not though cause Mike to reconsider his interpretations of his roommate's behaviors, but to additional efforts to prove the truth of other stereotypes about blacks – that they are loud and play loud rap music that he does not "get" – which was portrayed generally throughout the sketch. His statement about "he seemed like he was a hard worker and stuff," was used to both buffer any claims of racism that might have been launched toward him and to further convey the extent of his black roommate's "abnormality." Zizek's (1993) understanding of modern racism as a function of perceived "theft of enjoyment" clearly applies to both Bethany's and Mike's negative and disdain for "their" behavior. Within this paradigmatic schema, Zizek unpacks the function and adherence to PC (politically correct) language as a central and structuring element, not only to modern racism, but to the very existential integrity of the hegemonic white male identity:

> The positive expression of this ambivalence toward the other's fantasmatic enjoyment is the obsessive attitude that one can easily detect in what is usually referred to as "PC," political correctness: the compulsive effort to uncover ever new, ever more refined forms of racial and/or sexual violence and domination…The problem, here, is simply "how can one be a white, heterosexual male and still retain a clear conscience?" All other positions can affirm their specificity, their specific mode of enjoyment, only the white-male-heterosexual position must remain empty, must sacrifice its enjoyment. The weak point of the PC attitude is thus the weak point of the neurotic compulsion: the problem is not that it is too severe, too fanatic, but quite on the contrary that *it is not severe enough*. That is to say, at first glance, the PC attitude involves the extreme self-sacrifice, the renunciation of everything that sounds sexist and racist, the unending effort not unworthy of the early Christian saint who dedicated his life to discovering in himself ever new layers of sin. Yet all this effort should not dupe us; it is ultimately a stratagem whose function is to conceal the fact that the PC type is not ready to renounce what really matters: "I'm prepared to sacrifice everything *but that*" – but what? The very gesture of self-sacrifice. In other words, the PC attitude implies the same antagonism between the enunciated content and the position of enunciation that Hegel denounced apropos of the ascetic self-humiliation: it conceals a patronizing elevation over those whose injuries from discrimination are allegedly compensated. In the very act of emptying the white-male-heterosexual position of all positive content, the PC attitude retains it as a universal form of subjectivity. As such, the PC attitude is an exemplary case of the Sartrean *mauvaise foi* of the intellectuals: it provides new and newer answers *in order to keep the problem alive*. What this attitude really fears is that the problem will disappear, i.e., that the white-male-heterosexual form of subjectivity will actually cease to exert its hegemony. The guilt displayed by the PC attitude, the apparent desire to get rid of "incorrect" elements, is therefore the form of appearance of its exact opposite: it bears witness to the inflexible will to stick to the white-male-heterosexual form of subjectivity. Or, to put it in clear, old-fashioned political terms: far from being a disguised expression of the extreme Left, the PC attitude is the main ideological protective shield of the bourgeois liberalism against a genuine leftist alternative. (213-214, emphasis in original)

Within this paradigm, the hesitation of both Mike and Bethany and, at times, scripted clauses using "I statements," serve the purpose of discussing race and racism within the

context of higher education, a "liberal" environment to a non-white, but also non-black graduate student. Bethany's "maybe white people do it too" and Mike's "he seemed like a hard worker" encompass this form of PC discourse that permeates, in efforts to diffuse, their unmistaken antipathy and contempt for blacks. These confirmations of racist logic, although not the original intent or even solitary reading of the sketch, is possible though and because it competes for dominance in interpretation, "The Mad Real World" is transgressive in intent only, since it ultimately creates ambivalence, where meaning is obscured. The PC tendency is even more apparent in the other white participants that proffered more racially progressive readings of primarily the *Blind Supremacy* sketch. As noted in the type of race progressiveness of SNL that both attempts portrayal of race and racism while simultaneously distancing themselves from culpability, in some instances, white female and male participants responded in kind as they located all white racism in "degenerate" white identities like the redneck (Hartigan 1999).

> Lindsay: You know I've spent time in the South, and just like that whole thing's just like I feel I've seen stuff like that before and so like the shock value isn't there for me, like I haven't seen like Ku Klux Klan rally, but like I've seen the rednecks and I've seen the white supremacists, it just isn't, for anything it's more I feel like I'm rallying more on the Dave Chappelle side than like the white people side. [JK: So you agreed with his portrayal of those subset of Whites?]
>
> Lindsay: Yeah. They're just like so ridiculous that there are people that feel so adamantly about different people of their skin color.
>
> Brad: I grew up in the country and it's definitely, I learned more about racism and stereotypes there than I did here. [JK: Where are you from?]
>
> Brad: Cooperstown, about an hour away from here. I'm surrounded by farms and things like that. And I live here, and I'm surrounded by all different cultures and diversities and then you go home and all of a

> sudden, and I heard white people say the "N word" and I'm like, "Where did this come from?" I guess you guys got a smaller consciousness not in the city. The redneck is a stereotype but I mean I know my one friend was this "emo" thing but now all of sudden he wants to be the country redneck guy, so now he wears flannel and hunting orange hats and drives a pick-up truck and does all these things to become a redneck. You're not a real redneck you're just doing all these things to try and look like one.

Brad and Lindsay were white participants in the other all-white focus group and both of them express a strong discursive orientation that aligns them with Chappelle's transgressive intentions. Part of their satisfaction and enjoyment of *Blind Supremacy* was not necessarily the transgressive racial discourses but with their ability to clearly and consistently define boundaries between the racist white supremacist characters portrayed and their race progressiveness. They felt comfortable in their laughter because they were laughing at the "right" things and because, according to Zizek (1993), is confirmation of "the inflexible will to stick to the white-male-heterosexual form of subjectivity." These white participants *do* display a type of race consciousness – Brad, the other white participant to comment on *The Mad Real World*, expresses his dismay over the absence of explicit directives from Chappelle to counter the stereotypes enacted:

> Brad: I thought the general message was just trying to point out stereotypes, just that they exist and here are some of them and this is what people think and I don't really see him going against, I mean he's just showing people acting as racist and things like that, he's not really showing the opposite end, or showing don't say, or don't do this I guess he does that when he actually talks after the skits, but he's really just throwing out these are stereotypes, these are racist, racist thinking. I kind of wish he would do more about like not, well this is wrong. Because it really is, *The Mad Real World*, really what it is, is black people acting like white supremacists think that all black people act. He doesn't show anything to make you think otherwise.

The problem for Brad is not that the ridiculousness of the racist stereotypes should provide enough incongruity with real life experiences with black people, it is the failure of Chappelle who "doesn't show anything to make you think otherwise." Furthermore, Brad reasons that the stereotypes performed are only thought by white supremacists, clearly not all whites, just the "bad" ones. In this reading, there is no room for or existence of the propagation of these same stereotypes, all of them confirming an overarching racial ideology, in the minds of the "good" whites. Chappelle's technique though of using hyperbole and exaggeration was indeed successful for these white participants though, as they understood and aligned themselves with the second sight Chappelle accomplishes – as Brad says, "really what it is, is black people acting like white supremacists think that all black people act."

Black female responses to *Blind Supremacy* concentrated on the potential for misinterpretation, inherent in many comic attempts for transgressive racial discourses and representations, of non-blacks and underwent a form of re-experiencing past acts of racism. Trisha, the black female in the mixed-race focus group, at various points, conveyed these sentiments:

> Trisha: When he's describing blacks, blacks are dirty, blacks big nose, breathing up all the white air, blacks big butts, like all the little stereotypes that I'm used to hearing that would categorize myself to thinking "Oh they're talking about a black person." Like those stereotypes were quite funny but at the same time, was like "Okay, alright, okay, stop, okay, it's enough already."

> Trisha: It's just the fact that Dave Chappelle, like the African American society they find it, they use it as joke now this time of whites and blacks that whole issue and they seem to play on it, and they continue to use it in their comedy and their stories. Oh yeah, any way that they can, this was

> pretty, it wasn't funny but it was quite like, back in thinking a black guy can really be supporting the other kind when it's the color that he's not, and it was just, it was, it was amusing, but it wasn't, 'cause ignorant things he was saying about the minorities, either being white, black, Asian, or whatever you are, it's just…It was funny but it was ignorant, I think that's comedy today, it has a lot of ignorant comments, no matter what color you are, because you can be a white comedian go up and say something and he can talk about black, but it's funny, but it's still ignorant at the same time.

And Malika, in the all-black focus group, recounts her experiences of having to discount the validity of stereotypes of blacks, in a general response to the manner in which Chappelle critiques:

> Malika: I mean it's, you know he's poking fun at like the stereotype and generalization but at the same time, some of it's like I mean, there's some people that watch that, you know like, they laugh at it. I know a lot of people that used to watch it and laugh at it and they kind of thought that's how…Caucasian people thought "You know, oh well, yeah, he said, he's talking about real life [emphasis] and I'm like yeah, that's not the whole population. I've heard them say like oh you know da-da-da-da-da, "Is that how you guys act?" And I'm like no.

Amanda, also in the same focus group, adds to Malika's experience, referring more specifically to the discursive, rather than performative, satire of stereotypes of blacks in *Blind Supremacy*, shares a piercing experience with a racist comment from a complete stranger:

> Amanda: You also hear the audience laughing in the background and it makes it seem more natural. I don't know…To kind of continue actually my cousin and I were going out to eat and an older white male was coming out of the restaurant and well, we were leaving and he was going in…[JK: Where was this?]
>
> Amanda: I believe it was Old Country Buffet, so we were going…[JK: In the suburbs then?]

> Amanda: Yeah. We were coming out and he was going in and he said, "Well I hope there's some more chicken left, I know how you guys like chicken." And we didn't really catch on to it until he disappeared, did he just say that [laughter of other participants]. [JK: Was he smiling when he said that?]
>
> Amanda: Yeah, he thought it was funny, that kind of bases off of Dave Chappelle because uses that like black people always eat chicken, black people lazy, just like the stereotypes, then like for people to actually see that, like they say they think it's true. I can laugh at it, but then in the back of my mind say "that's not right."

Malika points out the potential, noted by Weaver (2011), of rhetorical ambivalence to confirm racist beliefs and ideology and Amanda points out the effects of the "laugh track" production decision that also confuses meaning. Although Weaver was specifically referring to the confirmation of racist ideology on the part of the viewer/reader, here we have the recounting of this phenomenon from Malika, who had to field ignorant questions from non-blacks about the truth of popular culture stereotypes and from Amanda, who draws a direct link between the comedic manner in which Chappelle satirizes stereotypes of blacks and the inappropriate humor of a random white male, joking about the stereotype that black people like chicken. Amanda reacts to the part of Bigsby's racist rant, the same one as Trisha reacted to, when he details for Kent Wallace (the fictional *Frontline* reporter) his problem with blacks:

> Wallace: You refer to N-, uh, I mean African Americans, what exactly is your problem with them?
>
> Bigsby: How much time you got, buddy? Where would I start? Well, first of all they're lazy, good-for-nothing tricksters, crack smoking swindlers, big butt-having, wide-nosed breathing up all the white man's air (change of scene from Bigsby's front porch, to them walking across a bridge on his property), they eat up all the chickens, think they're the best dancers, and they stink! Did I mention that?

As the white male said to Amanda "Well I hope there's some more chicken left, I know how you guys like chicken," her aversion to and skepticism of Chappelle's comedic transgressive techniques is understandable. In a tragic way, her experience confirms Chappelle's characterization of not only extreme cases of white supremacist racism, but illustrates that both "good" (Amanda's experience did not occur in the south, or with a stereotypical version of white racism) and "bad" whites not only continue to hold these beliefs, but are comfortable expressing them. For her, the overall permissiveness of racial discourse, encouraged by a joking culture propagated by comedians of all races, leads to a complicated and dangerous every day experience where she can "laugh at it, but then in the back of my mind say 'that's not right.'" Perhaps for this reason, Pryor's reinterpretation of *To Kill A Mockingbird* represents a safer route to attacking the virulent white supremacist racist and the Jim Crow era of racism because he also makes narrative changes, where the black male, wrongly accused of raping a white woman, is exonerated, whereas the revelation of Chappelle's blind black white supremacist's blackness leads to despair and divorce from his white wife because she was a "nigger lover". Indeed, Chappelle's choices only serve to confirm the insanity of white supremacist racism, the

corrosive ways it destroys the humanity of both blacks and whites, and underscores the durability of racist logic. As both black and white participants have expressed above though, satirizing racism without presenting alternate realities, outcomes, or choices often leads to misinterpretation, confirmation of racism, anxiety, and the reliving of personal experiences of racism.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Exploring the particular cultural meanings of transgressive sketch comedy reveals the potential of the cultural form to remake complete hegemonic continuity; perhaps for this reason, Hegel considered comedy a crucial manifestation of the processes of human consciousness. Indeed, the sketches discussed above are exactly at the intersection of a critical assessment of race ideology and the development of an alternate interpretation, a transformed representation, of the consciousness that both accepts, challenges, and reinvests cultural meanings with multivocality. In these representative comedic examples, the strict trappings of hegemonic cultural production is weakened and their accompanying cultural symbols and meanings – the others, those sidelined by racial ideology and hierarchy claim a part in the production of knowledge. The cowboy, an integral symbol to American nationhood, pride, and a foundational element to white hegemonic masculinity; the power of single-voiced discourses that perpetuate racial hierarchy and post-Civil rights era racism; the myopic and alienating trappings of a black-white binary; and the sanctity of racist tropes and representations are all questioned, often revealing their rotting infrastructure of logic, and the production of stories, perspectives, and meanings, previously silenced or subordinated, is possible. When Chappelle "forces heteroglossia" he not only contends with racist discourse, he also creates existential spaces for the release of "inappropriate" emotions like anger and indignation, while also cultivating the expansion of the boundaries of identity formation.

Identity formation vis-à-vis popular culture representation often focuses on the serious forms of narrative, like dramas, tragedies, and the news. These inquiries and their findings are paramount, convincingly suggesting that even though structure is determining, the process is contingent, it is arbitrary, and it is vulnerable to transformation.

Cultural meanings are elemental to our social existence. Their overarching immersion in our social ontology, these "collective emotions and ideas," these "subjective and internal feelings that so often to rule the world" form the "will of collectivities; shapes the rules of organization; defines the moral substance of law; and provides the meaning and motivation for technologies, economies, and military machines" (Alexander 2003:5). Not submissive or accommodating to the material aspects of social life, cultural meanings pervade constitutive aspects, revealing the logic of a once confounding puzzle. The primacy, or at the very least, the urgency of the comprehension of cultural meanings encourages reflection and criticism, of the pertinence of the stories that dominate knowledge and move toward the discernment between knowledge and power (Ibid). The unfortunate split between the "serious" and the "comic" in our societal assessment of important cultural symbols and meanings betrays a more complete and nuanced viewpoint and comprehension. Advancing the particular contribution that humor offers social analysis, Murray Davis (1993) noted how humor "may seem trivial, but it provides an inconspicuous back entrance to a person's, group's, or society's innermost chamber, which continually knocking on their front door may never disclose" (2). The

rearticulations of comic interventions represent very serious planes of societal dimensions, in this particular analysis, a race ideology that consists of discrimination, dehumanization, and subordination. The language of comedy illuminates those dimensions of race ideology that are particularly constraining, particularly stubborn, and particularly inaccessible – a distinct contribution to the overarching and dominant cultural narratives and representations. The comic discursive and representational examples above demonstrate the processes of reclamation, and of the simultaneously occurring liminal moments of meaning-making, and material expressions of collective cultural constructions.

Simon Weaver (2011) demonstrated the prevalence and rhetorical legitimacy and significance of racist joking. Truly, the proliferation of racist joking examined through seven US based internet websites[29] and his comprehension and his demonstration of the rhetorical validity of racist joking as a very serious component of the continuation of racism in the US and, to an extent, the UK, validates the attention to a continued examination of the relationship between race and comedy in the United States. As noted in Chapter 2, Perez (2013) charts the explicit ways that comedy instructors actively encourage and cultivate the use of racist characterizations, performances, discourses, and narratives in young and up-and-coming comedians in the 21st century. Undoubtedly, the

[29] Weaver (2011) examined the following websites: 1) Racist-jokes.com; 2) W.A.R. White Aryan Resistance at www.resist.com; 3) Blind Lemon's Nigger Jokes at www.SolarGeneral.com; 4) www.BlackJokes.net; 5) Black One Liners at www.kaitaia.com; 6) Tightrope (no website noted); and 7) www.d2jsp.com.

proliferation and solidification of racial hegemony is a principle occupation of the maintenance of racial hierarchy, hegemony, and the justification (and erasure) of a reprehensible national story regarding the earliest racial project in the establishment of the United States nation. So, Weaver's, Perez's, along with the critiques of Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Herman Gray, and Darnell Hunt, legitimately incisive and necessary critiques of the relationship of race and media, and in some cases, specifically to comedic media, are wholeheartedly not overlooked or refuted in this analysis. Because Weaver's analysis on racist internet joking culture in contemporary American culture is the most current and relevant to this study, specifically in terms of similar cultural forums, the additions and critiques of his evaluation of contemporary racism as not necessarily "post-racial," but rather indicative of an uncontrollable and unmediated surge in ambivalence, resulting in "liquid racism," serves to continue this noteworthy examination of contemporary race and racism. But also including an emphasis on popular culture forums that reach unprecedented levels of consumption (television), an ability to track authorship, to examine both statistical and interpretive trends over time, and to an extent, the ways in which production processes intervene and sometimes interfere with the author's intention, and a focus on counterhegemonic endeavors.

To make a brief point about the relationship between sociological analysis and how we define empiricism (in most cases, in the pursuit of the patterned, recurrent, and "objective," social facts), this study hopefully calls our attention back to the importance and viability of textual analysis. While defined traditionally as "subjective", textual

works (including the visual), through the application and consideration of Bakhtinian heteroglossia reveal the multivocality – not reduced to one subjective voice or perspective – of not only ironic or parodic texts, but in several works of literature, as evidenced by Bakhtin's deep analysis of Dostoevsky's body of work in *Discourse in the Novel* and the presence of competing perspectives when the dialectic in humorous formats is properly formulated and executed. Texts, while often authored by one person, are also conceived and written, and thus influenced, by the social contexts in which they are produced. Wendy Griswold (1987) noted in her conceptualization of the "cultural diamond" that a complete sociological analysis of culture considers the four points of the diamond – the cultural object (the text), the social world, the receiver (audience or reader), and the creator (artist, comedian, writer). Each of these four points of the diamond is interconnected to one another cross-sectionally and also flows from one to the other in a circular manner. In this conceptualization, each point affects the other three points equally; with no one point beginning the chain of creation or one having more influence over another point. This study has concentrated the most on the cultural object, or the text, in many ways, because sociologically, we have discovered so little about this unpredictable cultural sphere. Indeed, audience reception studies have contributed invaluable insights to how cultural texts are negotiated by social actors, but the internal dialectic between text and receiver within sociological analyses has been often sidelined. Chapter 5 explored very nascent narrative trends regarding black and white responses to *Chappelle's Show* and have certainly added to the textual considerations presented above, with a focus on how we, as situated social actors, interpret, contend with, and often are

reminded of the painful consequences of experiencing and surviving racial hegemony. Oftentimes, as evidenced in the participant's responses, comedic renditions of race and racism facilitate a reconsideration of racial ideology and the comparison of "real life" experiences to the "reality" of those projected on the television screen. A continuation of audience reception of sketch comedy on race over time is an intended extension of the dissertation, to add to the kind of concreteness of narrative trends of responses to comedic discourses and representations of race across racial categories that interview and focus group methodologies offer. While production was explored somewhat in the above analysis and discussion, another extension of this project would involve observing and analyzing how comedians think through racial humor and how then that these intended meanings are negotiated, shaped by, and, at times, thwarted by influencing production forces inherent in the television industry. Capturing Griswold's conceptualization of the "social world" for this study will be pursued through the quantitative and qualitative analysis of popular media responses (from mainstay publications like *The New York Times*, televised media commentary, blogs, internet chatter, and comments to various comedic instances on YouTube, or other cyber-forums, and magazines) that will act as material manifestations of widespread, public responses to transgressive comedic discourses and representations of race over time. In a sense, how does our "collective consciousness" incorporate counterhegemonic agitations? How do we negotiate through story lines, controversies, and the state of racial politics over time in the post-Civil Rights era? Comparing the local cultural text to broader cultural texts will likely lead to deeper comprehension of the local text, the broader text, and in its widest application and

realization, to the ways in which cultural meanings, however they manifest, are central to digesting, accepting, and confront our current social condition (Smith 2001; Alexander 2003; and Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006).

Combining the mediation of these comedic discourses through public discourses, like popular news and magazine articles will establish a wider assessment of the relationship between race and comedy, responses to transgressive agitations, and a deeper understanding of how comedy is deployed to maintain and challenge race ideology. The findings of my dissertation concentrate on the range of discourses and representations that comedy produces vis-à-vis constructions of racial identities, racist logic and hierarchy, and how these change over time. By introducing public commentary on these narratives and representations and, in turn, how these public commentaries share particular narratives, the assessment of how transgressive comedic discourses and representations of race interface with wider, operating cultural meanings is possible. Three levels of interpretations exist: 1) of the visual text; 2) of public discourses in response to said meanings; and 3) of how our collective cultural consciousness is both informed by and contributes to ongoing cultural construction processes. Using content analysis of historical and current day popular commentary on the sketches already analyzed and identifying the particular ways responses to transgressive comedic discourses and representations of race are established and maintained will provide a multi-level accounting of how popular culture interventions are situated. Furthermore, the relative inattention sociological research and theory on race has given to comedy and

humor will be addressed, leading to a deeper, more complicated understanding of racialization processes.

"The Merits of a Fool" is about the potential for comedy to challenge race ideology. Despite its inherently unserious nature, comedy relies on the unique discursive forms of parody and irony, which rely on a dialectical relationship of language. That is, comedy produces double-voiced discourse and generates ambiguity, making the emergence of secondary or silenced perspectives possible. Not to be taken as an ancillary characteristic, this transgressive possibility of humorous cultural forms is most associated with literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin and his examination of carnivalesque. In these temporal havens, the ordered and oppressive social world was reversed and mocked, officially mandated by local authorities, and promoted the truth of the unseen. On the one hand, this positively transcendental vision of the carnival spirit by Bakhtin is called into question when considering the integral role comedy, in the form of minstrel shows, played in reinforcing and maintaining white supremacy in the United States after the abolition of slavery. Indeed, superiority theories of comedy's social function argues that the primary role of comedy exists to affirm hierarchical distinctions and to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, black minstrel performers later used the permeability of the humorous context to interject critique and derision toward white supremacist ideological representations and discourses they were simultaneously performing.

A similarly confounding relationship between race ideology and contemporary comedy shows exists presently, with controversy commonly associated with some of the

most notable and successfully transgressive comedy shows, like *Chappelle's Show* and *The Richard Pryor Show*. Through the analysis of 1,102 sketches on comedy shows that ranged from *The Smothers Brothers Show*, to *Saturday Night Live*, and *In Living Color*, the landscape of discourses and representations of race demonstrates a peak of transgressive comedy in the 1970s, high levels of ambivalence in the 1990s, and the complications that the myth of a colorblind society present for sketch comedy shows in the 2000s. The jester, a historical figure granted "licensed impudence", the clown, embodying the grotesque, and finally the fool, the socially mandated master of ceremony who instigates misrule and reversal through parody exist to preserve a particularized form of resistance by interrupting hegemonic continuity and providing alternate or submerged perspectives the opportunity to emerge. The silencing effects of the myths of colorblind and post-racial society result in a critical engagement with race an uncommon and uncomfortable social reality. Comedy continues to provide a familiar cultural context that demonstrates the durability and mutability of race ideology and the varying ways domination, resistance, and ambivalence establish meaning and relevance. Similarly, as popular critical engagement with race ideology is often isolated to moments of violence, or crisis, a glaring manifestation of the continuing effects of racism, the need for a rigorous understanding of transgressive attempts is clearly evident. Comedy functions as a social sphere, producing cultural meanings, narratives, and representations, that in its architecture is both apart of and alienated from dominant society. This doubly temporal and material characteristic of comedy renders a unitary, limiting, and quite often oppressive paradigm impossible.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.

DATASET

Table 10. *Dataset*

Year	Controversial Show	Comparison Shows
1967	*Smothers Brothers*	*Carol Burnett Show*
1977	*The Richard Pryor Show*	*Carol Burnett Show* *Saturday Night Live* *The Flip Wilson Show*
1990	*In Living Color*	*Saturday Night Live* *The Ben Stiller Show* *Idiot Box* *The Kids in the Hall*
2003	*Chappelle's Show* *Da Ali G Show*	*Mind of Mencia* *Blue Collar TV* *Cedric the Entertainer* *Saturday Night Live* *Mad TV*

N=1,120 Sketches

APPENDIX B.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON SKETCH COMEDY SHOWS

The Ben Stiller Show

The Ben Stiller Show aired on MTV from 1990 to 1991 and then on FOX from September 1992 to January 1993, focusing on parodies of the subculture of the 1980s and 1990s. Despite positive reviews, the show was ultimately canceled due to low ratings. In 1993, the show won an Emmy for Outstanding Writing in a Variety Series.

Blue Collar TV

Airing on the WB from 2004-2006, *Blue Collar TV* drew material from hillbilly, redneck and Southern stereotypes. An extension of the hugely successful *Blue Collar Comedy Tour*, its transition to television proved less popular leading to a cancellation in 2005, with a brief return in 2006 for its 2nd season. Later that year when the CW network replaced the WB, *Blue Collar* was not picked up to complete its season.

Carol Burnett Show

From 1967-1978, the show ran for 278 episodes on the CBS network, won 25 Emmys and other distinctions such as one of *Time* Magazine's best 100 TV shows of all time. The show's popularity and influence have remained strong with contemporary reunion specials in the 1990s and 2000s.

Cedric the Entertainer Presents

Hosted by comedian Cedric, the show aired on Fox in 2002 and despite renewal for a second season was ultimately canceled.

Chappelle's Show

While the main content of the show is quite multi-faceted, the show's star has been the center of controversy for his frank and frequently irreligious depictions of blacks and whites and the state of race relations in the US. Controversy only intensified after Chappelle mysteriously and abruptly left while taping season 3. Despite the release of subsequent seasons on DVD, season 1 still holds the title of best-selling TV series released on DVD of all time (selling over 2 million copies in 2004), over other wildly popular and arguably more accessible network TV series such as *The Simpsons, Family Guy, Seinfeld,* and *Friends*. The show has earned two Emmy nominations and two Teen Choice Awards and Chappelle has also been nominated for two Image Awards for "Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series," all in 2004 and 2005.

Da Ali G Show

Da Ali G Show is a satirical comedy show in which Sacha Baron Cohen plays three characters – Ali G, a caricature of appropriating British African-Caribbean and hip hop culture, Borat Sagdiyev from Kazakhstan and a gay, Austrian named Bruno – who as irreverent journalists ask offensive and absurd questions to unsuspecting participants, many of whom are celebrities and government officials. Each of these caricatures

function to embody stereotypical representations of homosexuality, non-black youth "acting black", and the misogyny, anti-Semitism, and uncultured attitudes and behaviors of the developing world. The character Borat has generated the most controversy, receiving protests from the Anti-Defamation League and an anti-Semitic comment from a Republic candidate for Congress. Originally aired in Cohen's native Britain, HBO picked up the 2nd season, after which Cohen released three movies featuring each character.

The Flip Wilson Show

The Flip Wilson Show aired on NBC from 1970-1974 and starred comedian Flip Wilson. Not only one of the first sketch comedy shows featuring a black comedian, the show garnered widespread popularity with both black and white audiences. The first two seasons enjoyed high Nielsen ratings, holding the number two spot for most watched television shows. The show was also notable for the recurring character Geraldine, played by Wilson in drag and introducing the "Theater-in-the-Round" stage format with a circular stage surrounded by audience members.

Idiot Box

Idiot Box was created following the success of the movie *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* and ran on the MTV network for one season, 1991-1992. Given the context of the network, the show was mainly a showcase for popular music videos with sketches interspersed, about 7 to 11 minutes of the total 30 minutes. Sketches were mainly absurdist humor and violent slapstick. Although the show was popular, the creators opted to cancel the show after 6 episodes due to another opportunity to produce a feature film.

In Living Color

A pioneer in sketch comedy due to its majority black cast, writers and producers, the show ran on the Fox network from 1990-1994. *In Living Color* focused on issues and subject matter pertaining to black identity and culture. Controversy frequently surrounded the show, mostly due to battles over censorship, leading to the departure of Keenan and Damon Wayans, creators of the show, after the fourth season. Other Wayans family members involved eventually followed suit. In October 2011, Fox announced a reprisal of the show, produced and hosted by Keenan Wayans, but by July 2012, Fox president expressed dissatisfaction marking the end of the show.

Kids in the Hall

A Canadian sketch comedy group formed in 1984, the group moved to television on Canadian network CBC 1988-1994 and to the States on CBS and HBO from 1989-1995. The show echoed the quirky and surrealist style of *Monty Python's Flying Circus.* The show explored issues of sexuality, especially gay characters and themes written by the show's openly gay cast member, Scott Thompson, and appealed to youth culture with satirical sketches of big business and the patriarchal nuclear family.

Mad TV

Based on *Mad*, the popular and long running (from 1995 to 2008) show has been nominated for 35 Emmys and won 8, remaining on Fox throughout its tenure. The show focused on parodies of various popular culture arenas – television, music, and movies.

Mind of Mencia

Hosted by Carlos Mencia, the show aired on Comedy Central from 2005 until 2008. Racial stereotypes are a frequent topic and although the show's premise marketed it as "offensive" and "in your face", public reception did not ultimately support this branding. The first season coincided with the absence of what should have been the third season premiere of the *Chappelle's Show* and the cancellation of *Stella*, filling its time slot.

The Richard Pryor Show

After a hugely successful special on NBC in May 1977, Richard Pryor was invited to host his own television show, airing in September 1977. Controversy surrounded the show, from its inception, and after 4 episodes, neither Pryor nor the network pursued plans to continue the show.

Saturday Night Live

By far the longest running and consistently popular sketch comedy show, *Saturday Night Live* premiered on NBC in 1975. Among its awards are 21 Primetime Emmys (126 nominations), a Peabody Award, 3 Writer's Guild of America Awards, #10

on TV Guide's Greatest shows of all time and was inducted into the National Association of Broadcaster's Hall of Fame. The show has become known as a springboard into fame for up and coming actors and performers, for its musical performances, and influencing voter behavior. While frequently stirring controversy, the show itself has avoided an overall classification as "controversial".

The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour

The show's two year run (1967-1969) was cut short, despite popularity, due to their controversial topics of choice – racism, the President, and the Vietnam War. From the beginning, the show was a departure from its contemporaries of television comedy, aiming toward a younger audience and racy themes. The show increasingly challenged the boundaries of acceptability of satirical comedy. Despite these challenges, the show was awarded two Emmys.

APPENDIX C.

CODING SHEETS AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Last revised: April 30, 2014

UNIT OF ANALYSIS: Each comedic segment (sketch, stand up, etc.) within an episode will be given a unique tag which will be an abbreviation for show's title, season number, episode number and number of segment in order of appearance. So the first segment on Saturday Night Live, Season 26, Episode 1 will look like: SNL2611.

SHOW: Title of the show

SEASON and EPISODE: Season number and episode number separated by a colon. So 10:3 would indicate Season 10, Episode 3

EPISODE TITLE: Title of episode, if applicable

ORIGINAL AIR DATE: Date episode broadcast

BROADCAST TIME: Time show begins

ACCESSED: Through which site was the show accessed (Netflix, YouTube, Hulu plus, etc.)

<u>Quantitative Analysis</u>

BROADCAST NIGHT

1 – Monday
2 – Tuesday
3 – Wednesday
4 – Thursday
5 – Friday
6 – Saturday
7 – Sunday

TYPE OF TV

1 – Network
2 – Cable

CHANNEL

1 – ABC
2 – CBS
3 – NBC
4 – Fox
5 – CW (WB)
6 – Comedy Central
7 – MTV
8 – HBO

YEAR

1 – 1960
2 – 1970
3 – 1990
4 – 2000

HOST (this variable might only apply to SNL)

NAME OF HOST

HGENDER (gender of show's host)

1 – Female
2 – Male
3 – N/A

HRACE

1 – Black
2 – White
3 – Asian/Pacific Islander
4 – Hispanic
5 – Bi or Multi-Racial
6 – N/A

ETHNICITY (write in if known)

FORMAT

1 – Sketch
2 – Stand up
3 – Commercial (includes PSA type skits)
4 – Cartoon

5 – Interlude (typically “off camera” conversations or interactions)
6 – Musical Performance (with or without humor)

RACIAL DISCOURSE (Is the sketch about race?)

1 – Yes
2 – No

IMPLICIT RACIAL DISCOURSE

1 – Yes
2 – No
3 – Missing

RACE PERF (racial performance where characters perform other racial identities)

1 – Yes
2 – No

RACIAL SLURS (use of racial slurs during sketch)

1 – Yes
2 – No

OF CHARACTERS

RACE

OF BLACK CHARACTERS

OF WHITE CHARACTERS

OF ASIAN CHARACTERS

OF HISPANIC CHARACTERS

OF BIMULTI (DESCRIBE)

OF OTHER CHARACTERS (DESCRIBE)

RACIAL PROPORTIONS

1 – Balanced
2 – Black
3 – White
4 – Hispanic
5 – Asian

6 – N/A
7 – Other (1 case in Pryor of a Native American stand-up)

TYPE OF HUMOR (This should be coded according to the *overall* humorous nature of the sketch. In the case that multiple types are used in relatively equal proportions, double or triple coding can be used, although this practice should be avoided.)

1 – Parody
2 – Satire
3 – Physical/Slapstick
4 – Vulgar (also referred to as "bathroom", "toilet", and "crude" humor, includes insult humor: increased interaction with audience, and/or other performers, usually consisting of offensive insults, think also of roasts)
5 – Blue (comedy based on sexism, racism, homophobic views, use of sexual jokes and profanity)
6 – Cringe Comedy (humor based on uncomfortable situations, uses awkwardness and embarrassing moments for comedic effect, think *Seinfeld's* character George, Sacha Baron Cohen), and blue comedy, which is risqué, indecent, vulgar, typically dealing with sex)
7 – Black Comedy (cynicism and skepticism, frequent topic is death)
8 – Surreal/Absurdist
9 – Playful (comic situations that are light-hearted in subject matter and presentation, here thought of snl2688, not parodying anyone, no use of sarcasm, they are imagining what christmas ornaments would be like if they were alive)
10 – NAP

HUMOR TECHNIQUES

1 – Logic
2 – Language
3 – Identity
4 – Visual
5 – NAP

Note: Each category includes more specific techniques as determined by Berger as follows:

Logic – Absurdity, Accident, Analogy, Catalogue, Coincidence, Comparison, Disappointment, Ignorance, Mistakes, Repetition, Reversal, Ridicule, Rigidity, Theme, Variation

Language – Allusion, Bombast, Definition, Exaggeration, Facetiousness, Infantilism, Insults, Irony, Literalness, Misunderstanding, Puns/Wordplay, Repartee, Sarcasm, Satire

Identity – Before/After, Burlesque, Caricature, Eccentricity, Embarrassment, Exposure, Grotesque, Imitation, Impersonation, Mimicry, Parody, Scale/Size, Unmasking, Stereotype

Visual – Chase Scene, Slapstick, Speed

GENDER

OF FEMALE CHARACTERS

OF MALE CHARACTERS

OF TRANSGENDER CHARACTERS

GENDER PROPORTIONS

1 – Balanced
2 – Female
3 – Male
4 – Transgender
5 – N/A

HOMOPHOBIC SLURS (use of homophobic slurs during sketch)

1 – Yes
2 – No

DRAG (characters perform in drag)

1 – Yes
2 – No

SEXUALITYPERF (performance of sexual identities)

1 – Yes
2 – No

[The following variables are season specific that is they are coded once for the entire season and will be kept with the first coding sheet in Excel for that show. So for SNL, data collection begins at Season 26, Episode 1. The data for these season codes will be kept with that coding sheet.]

WRITERS

#WRITERS

WGENDER

1 – Balanced
2 – Female
3 – Male
4 – Transgender

WRACE

1 – Balanced
2 – Black
3 – White
4 – Hispanic
5 – Asian

PRODUCERS

#PRODUCER

PGENDER

1 – Balanced
2 – Female
3 – Male
4 – Transgender

PRACE

1 – Balanced
2 – Black
3 – White
4 – Hispanic
5 – Asian

DIRECTORS

#DIRECTOR

DGENDER

1 – Balanced
2 – Female
3 – Male
4 – Transgender

DRACE

1 – Balanced
2 – Black
3 – White
4 – Hispanic
5 – Asian

CAST

#CAST

CGENDER

1 – Balanced
2 – Female
3 – Male
4 – Transgender

CRACE

1 – Balanced
2 – Black
3 – White
4 – Hispanic
5 – Asian

Qualitative Analysis

Sketches containing discourses about race will receive the deepest attention. Sketches not immediately, transparently about race will still be analyzed, as their meaning and linkages to overt references to race are quite unforeseeable. But, these "non-racial" sketches will not receive as much attention or time, the main objective is to capture the overall narrative, overall word use and latent meanings, and so on. On the other hand, all representations need to be handled with near parity. In this regard, all images are racialized, therefore, these descriptions will receive equal treatment, with added emphasis when story lines and discourses are racial.

Each sketch will receive separate attention within these categories, including analytic notes. At the end, a separate analytic reflection will focus on overall conclusions and hunches for the episode.

At the conclusion of each season, analytic notes will also be written, reflecting on overall trends, conclusions, hunches, contradictions, and so on.

Similarly, notes regarding the character of the show will also be compiled, these will hypothesize and summarize with a particular eye on comparative linkages.

PLOT/NARRATIVE

What is the story? Who are the characters? Are there archetypal characters (hero, villain, romantic interest, etc.)?

HUMOR

Was the sketch funny? Why?

SOCIAL/"REALITY": includes appearance, dress, costume, gesture, expression, speech, behavior of characters and environment of the "world" televised. Also here are notes on technical aspects of representation, the camera, lighting and sound.

Describe the appearance of the characters. What were they wearing? What was the setting? Generally, does the camera work rely on close up or wider perspectives? What is the impression of the characters? Note all elements that contribute to this observation.

DISCOURSE: semantic elements, word choice, and characteristics of language as they are connected to thematic elements

What words are used to describe, joke about race, stereotypes, racism and so on?

SEMIOTIC: latent meanings, here note binaries, signified/signifier (of sexism, materialism, racism/race, patriarchy, etc.), look for metaphors, synecdoche, symbols. This dimension addresses the ideological underpinnings of race discourse, the specific cultural symbols and values attached to certain messages and characterizations.

What metaphors are used? What symbols are used? What binary oppositions are relied on?

SKETCH ANALTYIC NOTES

EPISODE ANALYTIC NOTES/MESSAGES AND MEANING: Preliminary reactions to the episode, including messages and meaning in the individual sketches and episode, notes on linkages between sketches, emotional reactions (gut feelings), and any construction of categorical distinctions will also be included herein.

Focus Group Interview Guide

During this focus group, we will watch a few clips of *Chappelle's Show* as a group. I am here to facilitate discussion and pose the questions. I will not be actively participating in the discussion, as I am most interested in your views and opinions. Please remember that topics discussed and opinions expressed will be held in all confidentiality and with respect.

1. Please respond to the video clip we just watched.

2. [IF LIKE] What in particular did you like about it?

3. [IF DISLIKE] What in particular did you dislike about it?

4. [IF BOTH LIKE AND DISLIKE] What parts did you like and what parts did you dislike? Why?

5. Is there a central message? If so, please discuss.

6. If this was your show or for instance you were one of the show's producers, how would you change, if at all, the episode?

7. What would you keep?

Now I'd like to spend some time talking more in depth about how Dave Chappelle uses stereotypes in his sketch comedies. Take a few minutes to yourself to think about the stereotypes he uses, if you like or dislike them, and whether you find them humorous, offensive or apathetic. Your thoughts and reactions are not limited to this particular scope, they are simply guides to help you along.

8. Please give me a definition of a stereotype in your own words.

9. Let's discuss some of the stereotypes you identified from the clip.

10. Are there any differences in stereotyping of blacks versus whites?

11. [IF YES] What are those differences? How are they characterized or discussed in the sketch?

12. [IF NO] How do you think the stereotypes are similar? Are all stereotypes similar?

13. Do you find stereotyping humorous?

14. [IF YES] Are there any specific social contexts or situations that make stereotypes more humorous?

15. [IF NO] Please elaborate on why stereotyping is not funny to you. Are there other types of stereotypes that might be funny to you?

This wraps up the questions I had prepared for you, but I am open to any further comments you might have regarding *Chappelle's Show*.

16. Any questions that weren't included today that you think should be included?