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## Keepin' It Real: Facebook's Honesty Box and Ethnic Verbal Genres

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In 2008, I interviewed undergraduate students at my home university, Indiana University (IU), about how they use new media to end relationships. I asked them about their experiences with defriending (removing a friend from one's Facebook network), about texting a break-up conversation, and how they respond when they find out through Facebook that a friend has just ended a relationship. As I interviewed them, I noticed that the standard analytical categories that scholars use for classifying populations were not all that helpful for interpreting undergraduates' new media practices. Categories such as class, religion, gender, or ethnicity were not very useful in my interviews for predicting how someone understood or used new media as he or she was breaking up with a lover. Intriguingly, there was one exception—the “Honesty Box” on Facebook was adopted and used by African American students but not by white students on the IU campus. Launched in June 2007, the Honesty Box was a Facebook application that allows people to write anonymously to a Facebook profile. The Honesty Box was a fad, popular among some groups at the time of my research in 2007–2008, but which is no longer available.<sup>1</sup> At the time that some IU students were adopting the Honesty Box with a degree of enthusiasm, there was a clear ethnic divide between who was willing to put the Honesty Box on their Facebook profile and who would react with disquiet and even horror when I brought up the possibility of having one. Yet, few people I interviewed saw the Honesty Box as a Black-inflected technology, or an application adopted primarily by those affiliated with African American communities on campus. And conversely, no one during my research mentioned avoiding the Honesty Box as a specifically white thing to do. In this chapter, I discuss

why using this Facebook application in particular seemed to fall along ethnic lines, yet it was not openly invoked as a marker of ethnic identity.<sup>2</sup> I explore how different ethnic communities' shared semiotic ideologies about anonymity, gossip, and insults shape undergraduates' decisions to adopt and use new media.

My first inkling that African American students at IU might be more enthusiastic Honesty Box users than white students came when a student brought up the Honesty Box in a class discussion. I was teaching a course on ethnographies of education and asked students to analyze moments when they learned something in a nontraditional or hierarchically determined context, expecting to hear about instances when they learned about appropriate social behavior from their friends instead of from their teachers and parents. An African American student, one of two in that class, talked about how she always called her best friend whenever she got a message in her Honesty Box. The rest of the class was puzzled by her example. Only the two African American students had a clear sense of what the Honesty Box was. Everyone else was soon asking this student for a detailed explanation of the kinds of conversations this application enabled. I was curious: Why did only one of my students seem to use this Facebook application actively? I began to ask undergraduates about the Honesty Box in the 72 personal interviews and in surveys I conducted in my colleagues' large classes.<sup>3</sup> It took me a while to notice that the fact that my student was African American might have played a role in her decision to add the Honesty Box application to her Facebook profile. A clear pattern began to emerge the more people I asked about the Honesty Box—African American students found the Honesty Box more congenial than white students at IU. Yet, while I noticed this emerging pattern, the students I spoke to rarely noticed that there was this ethnic difference in how people used Facebook. No one told me that using the Honesty Box was a marker of Black pride, or indeed any kind of ethnic marker at all. No one told me that avoiding the Honesty Box was a sign of whiteness. When I asked both white and Black students about this apparent divide, they seemed to be inventing explanations on the spot. Unlike many of their other answers to my interview questions, this was clearly not something they had discussed with friends or even thought about before the interview. In short, the ethnic divide in using the Honesty Box was not an explicit divide, and it was not an emblem of what it might mean to have an ethnic identity—white or Black. As many studies of whiteness point out, whiteness is not often an openly marked category,<sup>4</sup> and new media use is not typically discussed as an explicit marker of white identity by either media users or scholars, with the exception of sites such as *Stuff White People Like*.<sup>5</sup> Yet, my Honesty Box case study is also in marked contrast to studies of other African American new media use—analyses of podcasts that create portable Black social spaces,<sup>6</sup> public blog posts revealing the heterogeneity

of Black perspectives,<sup>7</sup> or the role of signifyin' in demarcating Black Twitter.<sup>8</sup> Unlike these other studies, the question here is not how people self-consciously use new media to create an ethnic public sphere, but rather how new media use is so intertwined with offline practices that ethnic divides can emerge, irrespective of users' consciously performed communicative labor to demarcate an identity. Whether or not someone adopted the Honesty Box had everything to do with assumptions the person makes about how one communicates as well as their communicative practices but did *not* have much to do with how they consciously fashion their ethnic identity.

To understand Honesty Box usage, one has to understand the communicative practices it enabled. Most messages sent on Facebook have a known author. Users can send a Facebook message privately, writing on someone's Facebook wall publicly, or, as was common at the same time as Honesty Box's popularity, send gifts in the forms of electronic images to a profile. Each of these communicative acts is accompanied by the name of the originating Facebook profile. People can always use subterfuge to disguise authorship, by using another person's profile or creating a fake Facebook profile and sending the message using a false name. Yet, even with this subterfuge, every interaction has clearly marked authors on Facebook, unless one was using the Facebook application called the Honesty Box. The Honesty Box was an application that Facebook users chose to put on their profile that allowed other people to write messages to them anonymously and signaled to anyone viewing their profile that this was possible. Users could reply to the anonymous messages they received and even have ongoing conversations through the Honesty Box without ever finding out to whom they were writing. The only indication of the author's identity was a blue or pink highlight that indicated gender to the person receiving the messages (and even this could be concealed by the author of the message so that there was only a gray highlight for a message). In short, to choose to put an Honesty Box on your Facebook profile was to choose to allow people to write anonymous messages to you.

While anonymity and the ideologies surrounding anonymity crucially shaped people's Honesty Box use, just as fundamental were the publics people were addressing through their profile. After all, anyone who can see the Facebook profile can write in the profile's Honesty Box; it is not necessary to have an Honesty Box oneself to write in an Honesty Box. Here I should point out, for readers who may not remember the privacy settings available in 2007–2008, the different choices a person had at that time when determining how public to make their Facebook profiles. One could choose to allow (1) anyone on Facebook to see one's profile, (2) only people in one's Facebook network broadly defined (at IU that would include anyone with an IU e-mail account), (3) only Facebook friends (i.e., people one has

individually confirmed as a “friend” through one’s Facebook profile), or (4) a smaller subsection of one’s friends. The people who had access to an Honesty Box were the people who had access to one’s profile, and this level of access was decided by the profile’s password holder. In managing these privacy settings, people were thus managing the publics their profile addresses.

The Honesty Box presents an open question on the user’s public profile: “What do you think of me?” People were free to change the question, although for the most part, the people I have interviewed did not. Lucy,<sup>9</sup> a Chinese American undergraduate, was an exception to this, and indeed she was an exception in more ways than one, as the only person I interviewed who had an Honesty Box and was not part of an African American social circle. She explained to me that she and her friends had Honesty Boxes, which they used to pose targeted questions. They asked questions such as: “What do you think of my new haircut? What do you think about me doing this in my life?” Lucy continued to explain, “It was just some of the ones I have seen, because you can go through all your friends that have it and see what their question is. I didn’t use it for very long, because, as you said, you have to get people who are actually willing to write in it.”

While the questions and the Honesty Box itself could be seen by anyone able to view that Facebook profile, the actual utterances exchanged by using the Honesty Box were not public. Only those writing in a profile’s Honesty Box and those with password-protected access to the profile could read the conversation. Thus, the structure of the Honesty Box presupposed dyadic conversations, although in practice, groups of friends often cooperated to determine what to write in an Honesty Box or how to respond. After all, I first learned about the Honesty Box through a student’s story about consulting the same friend whenever she received an Honesty Box message. The interface posited that Honesty Box conversations were private conversations between two people, but in practice, several people might have contributed to writing and reading a message.

While the Honesty Box’s interface implies both anonymity and dyadic conversations, this is not necessarily consistent with people’s media ideologies of how the Honesty Box is used. By media ideologies, I am extending the linguistic anthropological concept of language ideologies to media. Michael Silverstein defines language ideology as “a set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use.”<sup>10</sup> Here Silverstein is pointing out that people’s understandings of how the language they and others speak functions may not be how the language actually functions. Yet, this does not mean that people’s beliefs about language should be dismissed as erroneous. Rather, beliefs about language are integral to how people communicate; their understandings recursively affect what they utter and how they interpret others’

words.<sup>11</sup> So too with media. How people understand the way a medium structures communication shapes how they use that medium.<sup>12</sup> To understand why IU white students rejected the Honesty Box while Black students adopted it, one has to analyze the ways that different language and media ideologies intersected for white and African American undergraduates around this media form. Both language ideologies and media ideologies are subsets of semiotic ideologies<sup>13</sup> and combine in specific ways to shape how people understand speaking anonymously in a public or dyadic conversation or insulting or courting someone using a given medium. In short, one must understand the ways that both language and media ideologies intertwine to shape the perspectives both white and African American students use to determine their adoption and interpretation of the Honesty Box.

### CHANGING SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGIES OF ANONYMITY

Before turning to the Honesty Box, I want to offer a historically specific example that revolves around changing notions of anonymity, an example that also demonstrates that neither linguistic structures nor new technologies solely determine how utterances will be made or interpreted. Rather, both language and media ideologies are crucial in shaping how a medium is understood to affect a message. Michael Warner argues, in *Letters of the Republic*, that ideologies of anonymity and public speech had to transform before it was possible to create a revolutionary public sphere. Colonial Americans had printed matter well before political debate began to take place through pamphlets and newspapers in early revolutionary America. It was not the availability of printing presses or the circulation of newspapers and pamphlets that had to change so public political debate could become widespread in print. Instead, it was colonial Americans' ideologies that had to shift before anonymous newspaper accounts could be seen as addressing a rational public comprised of persuadable citizens with contradictory political opinions. Prior to 1720, Americans did not form opinions by reading pamphlets and newspapers written by anonymous authors. Instead, sermons were the arenas in which political publics were constituted, and so political opinion was fashioned in face-to-face gatherings largely dominated by a single speaker. Warner writes that before 1720, "Far from being an impersonal sphere of political decision-making, publicness is a mode of sociability as subjection in an ideally non-negotiated social order . . . public activity and critical intentions are categorical opposites . . ."<sup>14</sup> In public gatherings, the most important social task the community as a whole accomplished was to show visible and uncritical support for the larger social order. During this period, people's opinions were widely understood to be based on their social status, and the persuasive force of their opinions also was dependent on their social status. As a consequence, anonymity undercut an audience's ability to

evaluate the speaker's political statements, a view of anonymity that was thrown into sharp relief only when people's attitudes radically shifted toward the anonymity made available through printing presses.<sup>15</sup>

In Boston, just before 1720, people began to think of print publications as a reasonable arena in which to express political arguments, an attitude that soon spread to other urban centers in colonial America.<sup>16</sup> This, Warner argues, was only possible because of changing ideologies of anonymity at that time. Anonymous communication began to be seen as creating the possibility for having reasoned disagreements over politics in a public arena, in which the authors' class or social position was supposedly irrelevant to the persuasive force of their argument. At the same time, the public addressed by pamphlets and newspapers also were presumed to be anonymous. Authors began to address a general public, even in missives framed as letters. There was a pre-supposition that readers one addressed were both equal and interchangeable. For the southern colonists especially, part of this new perspective's appeal was that it enabled Americans to keep in touch with people back in Britain.<sup>17</sup> This had unanticipated consequences. It was not until Americans changed their ideas about what anonymity made possible and whether critical or contentious public speech was appropriate that printed matter could become the vehicle for supporting a public sphere filled with wide-ranging debates over the nature of government and political representation.

Warner's study of the emerging public sphere in prerevolutionary America illustrates a number of important points helpful to keep in mind when turning to the much more contemporary Facebook Honesty Box. First, how one understands anonymity is specific to one's historical moment and community—not knowing the identity of an author can and will be interpreted in culturally and historically specific ways. Second, just as anonymity in itself is not sufficient to predict interpretation, neither is the medium one uses. To understand why a public sphere emerged in colonial America, one has to understand the contrasting ideologies contemporaries had of both face-to-face interaction and printed material and indeed their understandings of their entire media ecology. To understand how mediated communication is interpreted, one must understand the in-person interactions, which authors and audiences of utterances will inevitably counterpoise to mediated communication.

## **DIFFERENT IDEOLOGIES OF ANONYMITY**

Keeping Warner's insights in mind, I turn now to how different IU student communities' views of anonymous communication shaped responses to the Honesty Box. When I asked white students about the Honesty Box, the majority did not know what this Facebook application was. Black students (unless they were not on Facebook) would at least recognize the

Facebook application, even if they did not have one themselves. When I explained to white students what the Honesty Box was, their responses were all relatively similar. They typically responded with some form of the question: "Why would anyone want that?" Janine offered a typical explanation for why the Honesty Box did not appeal.

So I mean, like, this whole like anonymous feedback, like you can be anonymous and you can tell people what you like think, but like what's the point of that? You're just going to probably hurt their feelings and they're not going to even know you said it so what's the, I mean, if you actually wanted to say this to somebody like that, I mean, be mean, but don't say it? I mean or just say it to their face or something like that? But like, I don't know, Honesty Box?

Janine focuses on dyadic conversations in her response. She is imagining one other person in her network of Facebook friends and assumes that she might say things that are unkind to that person. These words she also presumes will inevitably sting, which, as I will discuss, African American students did not see as a given. She takes anonymity to be an opening for hostility, not, as the Honesty Box's own advertisement suggests, to "reply to anonymous posters and flirt with your crushes."<sup>18</sup> The few white students I interviewed who had Honesty Boxes themselves were both women and were part of a social circle that included many Black women. In general, the white students viewed the Honesty Box as opening the door to hostile conversations in which one person revealed the ill will he or she harbored but not his or her identity.

This is in striking contrast to how the African American students viewed the Honesty Box. I only spoke to one African American student, Harmony, who did not know what the Honesty Box was. She was not on Facebook. When I explained, she thought that she might have heard of it from her friends who were on Facebook, and that she would probably have an Honesty Box were she ever to be on Facebook. She said, "I would want to see how people think about me, and see how crazy and ignorant people are, so I would use it." While Harmony also saw the Honesty Box as opening up the possibility for negative comments, this was not reason enough to reject the Honesty Box. Harmony, along with the other African American students I spoke with, had a different vision of the possibilities and prices of anonymity.

## INDIRECTNESS AND INSTIGATING

A substantial body of research on African American communicative practices can shed light on the semiotic ideologies shaping these undergraduates' responses to the Honesty Box. Marcyliena Morgan's analyses of the roles that indirect speech and instigating as a verbal genre play in African American women's conversations are particularly helpful.<sup>19</sup> Morgan,

inspired in part by Alessandro Duranti's work on co-constituted intentionality,<sup>20</sup> argues that African American communities do not adopt the common white American assumption that speakers are maximally responsible for the meaning of their utterances. Instead, "Intentionality and responsibility are viewed as both socially situated and constituted so that speakers and audience collaborate in determining what is meant by what is said."<sup>21</sup> If people co-constitute the meanings of sentences together, this changes what it means to say an insulting thing to someone else.<sup>22</sup> In part, the speaker is revealing their intention, but at the same time, the hearer's response to the insult also helps determine its legitimacy.<sup>23</sup> Morgan explains, "[F]or many African Americans, it is not logical that a person would respond to something attributed to him or her unless it was true."<sup>24</sup> When told an insult in African American communities, the recipient is only expected to engage with the insult if he or she suspects that there is some validity.

Morgan suggests that this assumption about insults underlies a common face-to-face practice, baited indirectness—a form of indirectness that Jacobs-Huey has discovered in online African American forums as well.<sup>25</sup> Morgan found that African Americans will sometimes use indirect speech that is addressed to audience members with sufficient local knowledge to know whether the barbed statement applies to someone in particular or not. Not everyone listening is assumed to have enough local knowledge to interpret who the insult is directed toward. But responding, whether to affirm or protest, is an indication to all involved in the conversation that the barbed statement may indeed be true.<sup>26</sup> As Morgan explains, the function of the statement "is to make unambiguous participant beliefs and attitudes by provoking a response from those who fit the description."<sup>27</sup> In short, this form of indirect speech hinges on the listeners co-constituting the referential legitimacy of speaker's statements through their response. African American women, according to Morgan, over time will develop a social etiquette for when baited indirectness is appropriate or not. By their mid-20s, it is considered a social violation to use baited indirectness aimed at people who are not present and thus who cannot engage with the validity of the statement.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the African American women I interviewed often described having an Honesty Box as a strategy to find out what forms of baited indirectness might be circulating about them when they were not present. The etiquette rule, Morgan describes, develops in part because of African American women's experiences in their early 20s with what Morgan defines as the verbal genre of instigating.

According to Morgan, for African American women in their late teens and early 20s (the age of those I interviewed), talking behind someone's back is a serious offence. At the same time, gossip often creates an ambiguity for those who discover that people have indeed been talking about them. Perhaps the person telling the offended party about the insult is reporting



accurately, or perhaps they are in fact the instigator.<sup>29</sup> This anxiety builds on the social labor of an earlier age group, a group for whom Marjorie Goodwin points out that who said what about whom is a central and highly charged topic of conversation that young girls use to establish their social orders.<sup>30</sup> Building on Goodwin's analysis, Morgan argues that by the time these girls are teenagers, they will devote a tremendous amount of time trying to determine who in fact is the instigator and what the instigator's intentions might be, enlisting others in this search as well. "In the process of determining who the instigator is, friendships are tested, roles in conversations are assessed, and all involved parties become interested in identifying the alleged perpetrator of the speech event."<sup>31</sup> Avoiding this risk, or preventing themselves from being known as an instigator, might lie behind Kimberly Scott's finding that African American girls were willing to participate in computer-mediated conversations using websites that were new to them, but only if these were group conversations. They avoided dyadic conversations whenever possible and often created elaborate work-arounds to have whole group conversations when the site's interface presumed a dyadic interaction.<sup>32</sup> This might be, in part, to protect themselves from being known as instigators of gossip.

Gossip is an ever-present hazard, in part because it always could become widespread enough to transition into becoming a rumor. As Patricia Turner, a folklorist of African American rumors, argues, once a claim becomes a rumor, it will widely be accepted as valid, largely because it confirms general shared beliefs about how others act, even though people at the same time understand that the claim may not be factually the case.<sup>33</sup> The Honesty Box enables African American undergraduates to engage with instigating, gossip, and rumors in a different way than other types of conversation did. As Harmony explained to me when I first told her about the Honesty Box, some of its appeal lies in the possibility that one could uncover what people are saying about oneself and potentially tap into the transformation of gossip into rumor.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN TAKES ON ANONYMITY

Unlike white students, African American students did not necessarily see the Honesty Box as opening the door to personal attacks that harmed. They described the potential for both positive and negative comments; perhaps people would confess an attraction or compliment the person as well as point out someone's failings. People who actually had an Honesty Box reported a mix of comments—some compliments such as "You are a great girl," some warnings such as "Stay away from my boyfriend,"<sup>34</sup> some insults, and some perplexing poetry (with clues to the author's identity supposedly hidden in the verse).

When African American students did discuss the personal criticism the Honesty Box allowed, they talked about these statements in ways that were typically different from how white students described these critiques. They thought that these statements gave them insights into how a community saw them, not how an individual saw them. As Lola explained, for her the Honesty Box might have the potential to have some insight into how she was generally perceived, and in particular, into personal failings she could improve. She said, "I never want to be the person walking around with toilet paper hanging out their back and nobody's told them because they're scared or too embarrassed to tell them. I would prefer to just keep it real, and that's what we do. I was prepared to be hurt, it's okay. . . . I guess in a way the Honesty Box could be that." Lola saw Honesty Box comments as potentially offering a social mirror for attributes she had a certain amount of control over, and she could alter if only she knew what her flaws were. It was also a chance for Lola to learn what could potentially be said about her through baited indirectness in future conversations.

In an interview, Irulan described an instance when she wrote in an Honesty Box in similar terms, to let a woman know that she was generally considered arrogant. When I asked for more context, she explained that this was an opinion shared with her friends. "I have numerous friends who are like 'this girl is really rude and very mean and she walks on campus like she is so great.' It is what other of my friends have thought, although it is my opinion, it is what all my other friends think too." Upon being pressed, Irulan claimed she would not have necessarily said anything without the tacit legitimation of her friends' shared perception. She saw even the authorship of the utterance as co-constituted in the most general sense.

Uttering an insult through the Honesty Box is in contrast to other verbal genres in African American communities, like the dozens, where one would never insult someone with a widely yet secretly discussed truth. As Smitherman explains in her account of the dozens, "Thus the rule that is most crucial to the game is that the snap must not be literally true. For instance, despite all the sexual references in the dozens, nobody has actually gone to bed with anybody's mother."<sup>35</sup> By contrast, in the Honesty Box, one writes widely held opinions, providing insight in a private space as to which statements might be publicly transitioning from gossip to rumor.

Irulan continued to point out, just as Lola had, that an Honesty Box message could give people useful insights into their changeable reputations. She said, "If someone is to say 'I think you are a skank around campus' I will be like, 'oh, I had better cool down my ways.' . . . If someone wrote that about me, I would think 'someone thinks I am a skank around campus. Either they are just being a hater, or I had better think about things that I do.'" Irulan

describes Honesty Box insults as utterances to be interpreted as baited indirect speech—perhaps they apply to her and require a reaction, or perhaps not. Just as with in-person insults in African American contexts, the listener co-constitutes the validity of the statement, choosing whether the insult should be taken seriously or not. In choosing to add the Honesty Box to their profile, these students were not only signaling that they were willing to have a reflexive stance to these statements, analyzing the validity of an utterance, but also willing to dismiss it as incorrect. African American students frequently mentioned being thick-skinned when talking about these kinds of critiques. People I spoke with made a point of describing how little they allowed anyone's comments to affect them. This emphasis on the value of being able to take it, which the mere presence of the Honesty Box on someone's Facebook profile signals, is strikingly different than how white students view critique. It also speaks to a common theme in studies of African American verbal artistry. Smitherman, among others, argues that verbal artistry, and in particular the dozens, "was a form of release for the suppressed rage and frustrations that were the result of being a Black man or woman in white America. Despite economic discrimination and racist assaults against your personhood, you could ill afford to be hot; the dozens taught you how to chill. As well the game taught discipline and self-control . . ."<sup>36</sup> Smitherman suggests that the social labor of African American insult games is in part to prepare members of African American communities to face unflinchingly the ways structural inequalities in the United States are too often presented wrongly as personal failings and to encourage people not to go along with this mystification.

Some African American students also viewed Facebook in general, and the Honesty Box in particular, as a medium not to be taken seriously. For them, using the Honesty Box undercut the significance of any utterance, be it flirtation or insult. To say "I find you attractive" through the Honesty Box ensured that this statement would not be the start of a relationship, precisely because it was communicated through the Honesty Box. Irulan, who I mentioned earlier, also talked about a flirtatious conversation she began through the Honesty Box but then ended when she realized the man she was writing was very interested in continuing the conversations in person. They had started a guessing game, in which he was trying to figure out who she was based on what she looked like.

**Irulan:** I asked him a good question: Who do you want this to be?

**Ilana:** That is a good question.

**Irulan:** And he is like: I just want this to be a cool girl that he can hang out with. So I think he wanted to meet. And I was like: no, no, no, never in my life. Because this was just a funny prank kind of joke thing. It was funny that he wanted to . . . Why would I meet him? That's weird—this is the Honesty Box.

Irulan found it difficult to take the conversation seriously because of the medium through which it was being used. For Irulan, one does not communicate anything of importance through the Honesty Box, or through Facebook as a whole, for that matter. And for several people I spoke with, this removed some of the potential weight of people's critiques or come-ons; nothing said in the Honesty Box should be taken so seriously as to wound or excite.

## CONCLUSION

The Honesty Box's presence is an announcement that the profile user welcomes anonymous messages. Yet how people interpret this invitation, and Honesty Box messages in general, depends on how they understand anonymous statements, public utterances, and communicating via Facebook and whether insults reveal individual animosity or a community-wide critique. Analyzing Honesty Box use provides a lens into how different ethnic communities circulate knowledge, even when the members of these communities do not view these practices as markers of identity. It also provides insights into how new media create specific publics for different communities as well as how practices of expressing criticism and approval are transferred into new communicative technologies.

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## NOTES

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2. For other accounts of ethnic divides in adopting social media, see danah boyd, "White Flight in Networked Publics? How Race and Class Shaped American Teen Engagement with Myspace and Facebook," in *Race after the Internet*, eds. Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White (New York: Routledge Press, 2011), 203–22; Eszter Hargatti, "Whose Space? Differences among Users and Non-users of Social Network Sites," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2007): 276–97; Eszter Hargatti and Eden Litt, "The Tweet Smell of Celebrity Success: Explaining Variation in Twitter Adoption among a Diverse Group of Young Adults," *New Media and Society* 13 (2011): 824–42; S. Craig Watkins, *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for our Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).

3. The total number of students surveyed on this topic was 320.
4. For an overview, see Sara Trechter and Mary Bucholtz, "White Noise: Bringing Language into Whiteness Studies," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 11 (2001): 3–21.
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6. Sarah Florini, "The Podcast 'Chitlin' Circuit': Black Podcasters, Alternative Media, and Audio Enclaves," *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* 22 (2015): 209–19.
7. Alexandra Boutros, "Religion in the Afrosphere: The Constitution of a Blogging Counterpublic," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39 (2015): 319–37; Andre Brock, "‘Who Do You Think You Are?!’: Race, Representation, and Cultural Rhetorics in Online Spaces," *Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry* 6 (2009): 15–35.
8. Andre Brock, "From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 56 (2012): 529–49; Sarah Florini, "Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin': Communication and Cultural Performance on 'Black Twitter,'" *Television and New Media* 15 (2014): 223–37.
9. I use pseudonyms for all my interviewees, and interviewees chose their own pseudonyms.
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11. See also Bambi Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity, eds., *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Kathryn Woolard, "Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry," in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, eds. Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3–48; Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin, "Language Ideology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 55–82.
12. Ilana Gershon, "Media Ideologies: An Introduction," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20 (2010): 283–93.
13. See Webb Keane, "Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things," *Language & Communication* 23 (2003): 409–25; and Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 18.
14. Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 35.
15. Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*.
16. *Ibid.*, 36.
17. *Ibid.*, 43.
18. <http://www.facebook.com>, seen February 17, 2010.
19. Marcyliena Morgan, "Indirectness and Interpretation in African American Women's Discourse," *Pragmatics* 1 (1991): 421–51; Marcyliena Morgan, "More than a Mood or an Attitude: Discourse and Verbal Genres in African-American Culture," in *African-American English: Structure, History, and Use*, eds. Salikoko S. Mufwene, John R. Rickford, Guy Bailey, and John Baugh (London: Routledge, 1998), 251–81; Marcyliena Morgan, *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
20. Alessandro Duranti, "Truth and Intentionality: An Ethnographic Critique," *Cultural Anthropology* 8 (1993): 214–45.

21. Morgan, "More than a Mood or an Attitude," 257.

22. Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, "Signifying, Loud-Talking and Marking," in *Rappin' and Stylin' Out: Communication in Urban Black America*, ed. Thomas Kochman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 315–35.

23. According to what Morgan and other scholars, such as Thomas Kochman, argue, African Americans are well attuned to what it means to co-constitute speech. See Thomas Kochman, "Strategic Ambiguity in Black Speech Genres: Cross-Cultural Interference in Participant-Observation Research," *Text* 6 (1986): 153–70; Morgan, "More than a Mood or an Attitude," 251–81.

24. Morgan, "More than a Mood or an Attitude," 258.

25. Lanita Jacobs-Huey, *From the Kitchen to the Parlor: Language and Becoming in African American Women's Hair Care* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Morgan, "Indirectness and Interpretation in African American Women's Discourse," 421–51; Morgan, "More than a Mood or an Attitude," 251–81; Morgan, *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture*.

26. Morgan, *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture*, 50.

27. *Ibid.*, 51.

28. Morgan, "More than a Mood or an Attitude," 276.

29. *Ibid.*, 272.

30. Marjorie Goodwin, *He-Said-She-Said: Talk as Social Organization among Black Children* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

31. Morgan, "More than a Mood or an Attitude," 272.

32. Kimberly Scott, "African American Girls' Virtual Selves," *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education Journal* 3 (2005): 4–6.

33. Patricia Turner, *I Heard It through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

34. Kirsten, who received the message, thought that this was a futile gesture since the writer was anonymous. As Kirstin explained, she did not know who she was supposed to stay away from; so what was the point of writing in the Honesty Box?

35. Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin that Talk: Language, Culture and Education in African America* (London: Routledge, 2000), 228.

36. *Ibid.*, 225.