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In this research, I investigate Black Twitter on www.Imgur.com. I identify the general contours of Black Twitter images on Imgur as well as the reception and response to this content by the individuals who use this website. I first categorize the images of Black Twitter in order to describe their main features. Second, I describe the various ways that the individuals on Imgur respond to Black Twitter through a thematic content analysis and critical discourse analysis of the written comments. I conclude that Black Twitter on Imgur reproduces the same racist stereotypes that have been present in decades of media coverage of African Americans in the United States. Furthermore, the responses of individuals on Imgur to Black Twitter evidence anti-Ebonics ideologies, SIDE theory for group identity and participation, and the ongoing development of competing white, masculine identities in a color-blind space.

THE ICONIC GHETTO, COLOR-BLIND RACISM AND WHITE MASCULINITIES:

A CONTENT AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BLACK TWITTER

ON WWW.IMGUR.COM

by

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Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

To my wife, Nicole,

my constant companion through trials and triumphs,

who encourages and believes in me,

even when I do not.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by CHRISTOPHER M. JULIEN has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My research contributes to the literature on online communities and individuals'
actions therein, elucidating the ways that grass-roots, bottom-up communities perpetuate
the same stereotypes as those reproduced by corporate-controlled, mass media
productions. By introducing elements of group identity, my research provides more
evidence for the ways in which group identification shapes individual action in online
communities. By focusing on racial identity formation, my research shows how white
men express their race and enforce in-group and out-group norms and expectations in
digital spaces.

Research Questions

My research on www.Imgur.com concerns two main questions:

1. What are the main features of Black Twitter on Imgur?

2. What do users' responses to Black Twitter teach about white masculine
   identities in digital spaces such as Imgur?

Regarding question number 1, I uncover the main elements, features and
characteristics of Black Twitter on Imgur. I show what Black Twitter is on Imgur: what
do the images and text depict? At its core, then, this is a descriptive question, through
which I establish the basic boundaries of what is considered Black Twitter on

Imgur. To illuminate this further, I compare Black Twitter as it appears on Imgur with Black Twitter as it appears on Twitter.com by examining previous research on Twitter.com. Regarding question number 2, I discover how the individuals on Imgur respond to Black Twitter, and what these responses teach about the development of white masculine identities in a pseudonymous digital space.

In the literature review, I describe recent research on the internet generally, with an eye toward inequalities in digital interactions. Following this, I provide a basic description of the main website of my inquiry, www.Imgur.com. I then discuss traditional racism, modern racism, and the historic role of the media in perpetuating racist stereotypes. I also review the ways in which modern racism has been found in online spaces. Finally, I conclude my literature review with a discussion of SIDE theory and white, masculine identities in online spaces.

It should be noted from the outset that I approach this research as a previous participant on Imgur, turned-researcher. At the time of writing this thesis, I am a 26-year-old white male who is in graduate school, so I align completely with the demographic of those in my research. Therefore, because of my own demographic and my past participation on Imgur, I approach the main content of my research, Black Twitter on Imgur, not as an African American or as a part of another minority group, but rather as a member of the majority group on Imgur. This has undoubtedly shaped the questions and methods that drove my research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Internet and Dreams of Utopia

Early theorizing of the internet held out the promise of a utopian space free from the evil –isms that plague the "offline" world, such as racism and sexism. It promised to be a space in which people, rather than greedy corporations, would set their own agendas and control both the content they produced and the content they received. The people, therefore, would "shape democratic discourse through direct participation" (Daniels and Hughey 2013:333). Some argued that the internet represented the most democratic of all mediums because of the ease of access, anonymity, and lack of gatekeepers to bar certain individuals from participation (Introna and Nissenbaum 2000).

Many articulated the hope that because interaction on the internet was disembodied, the mind would be emphasized and privileged over the body (Daniels and Hughey 2013). Likewise, Lin (1999) estimated that networks online represented "a new era of democratic and entrepreneur networks and relations where resources flow and are shared by a large number of participants with new rules and practices, many of which are devoid of colonial intent or *capability*" (p. 45, emphasis mine). From this quote alone, the internet was hypothesized to be a space in which not only was there no "colonial intent," there was not even the capability or possibility of colonial intent. This is a bold claim that echoes many researchers' dreams of a democratic, utopian internet.

Research has shown, however, that the same inequalities present in the physical world have reared their ugly heads in the digital world. In explicitly white supremacist websites, as well as in seemingly "neutral" digital spaces, racism persists, echoing older forms of racism and giving voice to newer articulations of the same racist viewpoints (Daniels 2009a; Daniels and Hughey 2013). When individuals log onto the internet, they bring with them their own knowledge, belief systems, and experiences that have developed offline; race persists because individuals with feelings and beliefs about race persist rather than being wholly recreated in digital spaces (August & Liu 2015; Daniels 2013; Kolko et al. 2000). In line with this view, van Dijk argues that it is the mental model individuals have of the medium of the internet (which includes interpretation and evaluation of specific content) that mediates communication on the internet, rather than the internet itself deterministically shaping all discourse that occurs within it (2006; August & Liu 2015).

But do mental models alone mediate communication online? Rather than solely consisting within the individual, the affordances or capabilities of specific websites ease the path of users towards certain actions, while inhibiting others. No two websites online are truly the same, and an investigation into Black Twitter on Imgur requires an understanding of the importance of the capabilities granted to individuals *on Imgur*. To give an example of user action oriented within specific, unique websites, I turn to danah boyd's research on many American teenagers' move from Myspace to Facebook.

White Flight in Digital Spaces

danah boyd interviewed teenagers in order to discern their use of online social networking websites, such as Myspace and Facebook, from 2006-2007 (boyd 2012). As students described their migration from Myspace to Facebook, she found that issues of race and class were shaping the students' decision to leave Myspace and join Facebook. White students described Myspace as more ghetto, filled with hip-hop lovers, and full of images and designs that the white teenagers found gaudy and tacky (boyd 2012). In contrast, they saw Facebook as clean, simple, and sleek. Perhaps most telling, however, was their depiction of Myspace as unsafe and Facebook as safe (boyd 2012). Underneath the veneer of aesthetic preference was racism, prolific stereotypes, and the categorization of the "other." She therefore described this as digital white flight.

In the comments on news articles that followed this migration of white, middle-class teenagers from Myspace to Facebook, boyd noticed how those from Myspace and those from Facebook both demeaned one another. They invoked labels and stereotypes to belittle those who they perceived as "other." She writes,

> The language used in these remarks resembles the same language used throughout the 1980s to describe city dwellers: dysfunctional families, perverts and deviants, freaks and outcasts, thieves, and the working class (boyd 2012:220).

Here, there is the connection between common depictions of the iconic ghetto and the ways that white teenagers described Myspace. Myspace, just as the iconic ghetto, was seen as unsafe and filled with predators.

In the migration from Myspace to Facebook, the white teenagers named aesthetic preference, both in terms of webpage background (Myspace was seen as gaudy or tacky) as well as music (they described Myspace as full of hip-hip lovers), as one of the main reasons that they chose to leave Myspace. On Myspace, users were able to have music play whenever someone visited their personal webpage as well as change the background of their personal webpage. Beneath these capabilities afforded by Myspace, class standing drove aesthetic preference, which only thinly veiled the racism that was present. In other words, the specific form of the website drove the users' abilities within that website. The capabilities afforded by the specific website determined the way in which class standing manifested on that website.

However, various online communities grant their members different capabilities. This means that for each online community researchers wish to investigate, they must learn what capabilities and hindrances are bestowed on users by examining the interface of the website from the user's perspective. To this end, I turn to the website of inquiry, www.Imgur.com, to examine the basic features of the content, interactions, and demographics of individuals on Imgur.

The Basic Features and Demographics of Imgur

Imgur is an image-hosting website in which users communicate primarily by posting single images or gifs ("graphical interchange format": these are short clips of video, though without sound) or albums of multiple images and gifs, and by commenting on these images. Individuals are able to comment either directly on an image or

underneath someone else's comment, thereby creating dialogue. When one person comments on another user's comment, the original user is notified that they have received a comment. In this way, Imgur facilitates online discussion by informing users of their ongoing replies as they occur in real time. In Figure 1, you can see the bottom half of an image, three comments responding to the image itself, and one indented comment that is responding to the first comment on the image.
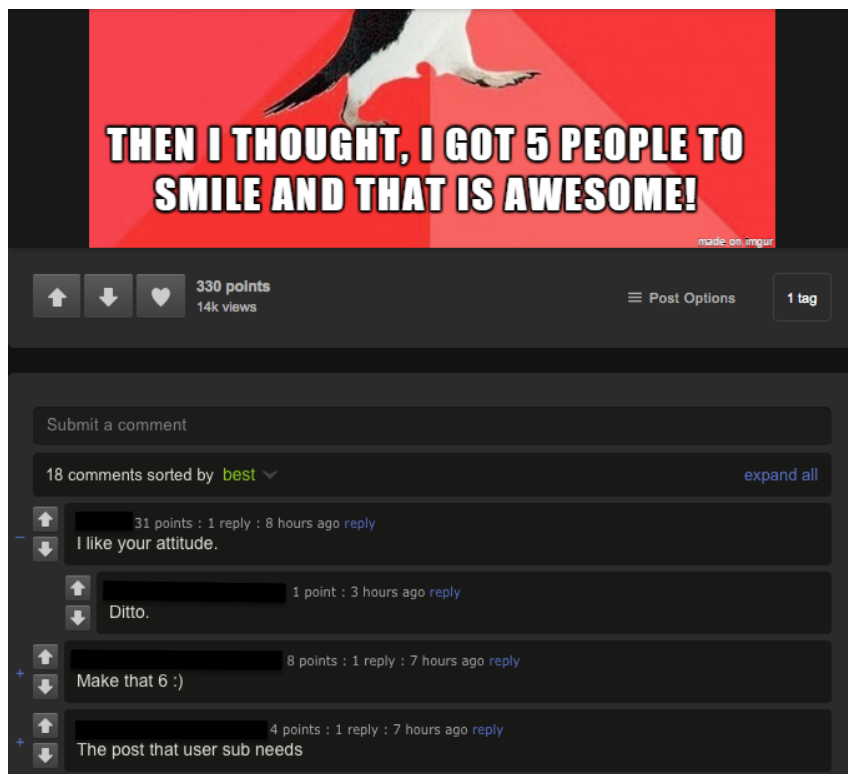
Figure 1. A Post on Imgur

Individuals on Imgur are mostly white (85%), male (83%) under 35 years old (71%) and highly educated: 32% are college students, 29% are college graduates, and 20% are either in graduate school or have completed graduate school (Mikal et al. 2015).

From the demographic data alone, Imgur is a highly-skewed space that underrepresents women, minorities, and those who have achieved less than a college education. On Imgur, however, there is no indication of a user's race or other demographic data. There is no profile picture, no general categories that users fill out in order to identify themselves and list their age, gender, location, or anything else. The only space Imgur provides for its users to identify themselves is a small "about me" section. Users can write whatever they wish in this space; they may leave it empty.

What gives shape to the collective voice that is heard on Imgur is the content posted by Imgur users (who are called "Imgurians") and the comments that are "upvoted" underneath this content. Users are also able to "downvote" comments and posts, which allows the community as a whole to stop content that is not well-received by the community from reaching the "front page" of Imgur. The front page only contains the content that has been consistently upvoted; specifically, images must receive 300 upvotes to be sent to the front page. Likewise, comments that are upvoted reach the top of a page, closest to the content, whereas comments that are downvoted are sent to the bottom of the page and, if they receive negative points, they are "hidden" unless the individual clicks a small link that says, "show bad comments."

In this way, Imgur does not facilitate discussion of unpopular opinions, since opinions that are downvoted are hidden unless shown. Imgurians need to take extra steps in order to see unpopular opinions and interact with the authors of those comments. Rather than listing comments by time, the default is to rank the comments from the most popular at the top of the page to the least popular at the bottom. More will be said about

the impact of Imgur's interface in reproducing dominant ideologies in the first section of findings.

Moving on from a general understanding of Imgur, I want to highlight briefly the differences between Black Twitter on Imgur and Black Twitter as it appears on another popular website, www.Twitter.com.

Black Twitter on Imgur.com and Twitter.com

My research concerns a viral phenomenon on Imgur known as Black Twitter. While there has not been anything written on the phenomenon of Black Twitter as it appears on Imgur, several researchers have investigated Black Twitter as it appears on www.Twitter.com (Brock 2012; Clark 2014). It should be noted from the outset that these two phenomena, while related, are different. Black Twitter as it appears on *Twitter* is focused on the themes of community, conversation, and intentionality, primarily among the African American community; I contend that Black Twitter on *Imgur* is focused on the themes of comedy, entertainment, and levity, primarily among a community that is overwhelmingly white and male.

Clark (2014) writes that Black Twitter as it appears on Twitter centers on meaningful conversation about black experiences in America. From these conversations, an intimate, enmeshed, and relatively stable community has developed. The individuals who participate in Black Twitter do so in order to converse about issues that are of the utmost importance to them: they talk about desired political reforms and the joys and sorrows of daily life in America as a black individual.

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However, such conversation and community that gathers around intimate, difficult conversations about being black in America is not present in Black Twitter as it appears on Imgur. Instead, Black Twitter is an object of entertainment on Imgur. Black Twitter on Imgur refers to images or albums that are understood to exemplify various aspects of the black experience in the United States. But whereas Black Twitter as it appears on Twitter engages users in active conversations about political reforms, no politically-oriented conversations about proposed reforms take place when Imgurians post albums of Black Twitter, view the content, and write comments.

It is significant that at a time when African Americans gained a liberated voice through Black Twitter on Twitter, in which they expressed the pains and realities of life in America, there arose viral content by the same name in an online community comprised of white men. This viral content continued to reproduce the very stereotypes that fueled prejudices and injustices against African Americans for centuries. Ironically, these same stereotypes initially necessitated African Americans to create specific spaces like Black Twitter, in which they felt the freedom to share their sufferings uninhibited (Anderson 2012; Clark 2014).

Black Twitter on Imgur is valued solely for its comedic potential. I further investigate this difference between the websites as I discover the main contours of Black Twitter on Imgur. In describing Black Twitter on Imgur, I compare and contrast its main characteristics on Imgur with its main characteristics on Twitter, highlighting the ways in which the content itself has been shaped in its navigation through digital space and residency in two different websites. Additionally, through analyzing the affordances of

Imgur, I discuss the ways in which the website architecture enables discussions of the themes of my investigation: white masculinities and color-blind spaces.

Entertainment on Imgur is neither amoral nor harmless. Stuart Hall writes that entertainment is one of the primary ways that people "*encounter* race without having to *confront* the racism of the perspectives in use" (1981:42; italics in original). Imgurians are unable to successfully pull back the façade of harmless, comedic pleasure and ask "serious" questions about Black Twitter, since asking such questions hinders others from having their fill of 'good, clean fun' (Hall 1981:42). This is seen in the negative reception by the Imgur community of comments that attempt to seriously discuss race.

As will be borne out from my content analysis, on Imgur, any users who attempt to confront the racism of Black Twitter are met with displeasure, as expressed through downvotes and oppositional comments. Through my content and discourse analysis of Black Twitter on Imgur, I show the ways that individuals express both traditional and modern racism on Imgur. I turn now to a discussion of traditional racism, modern racism and the role of media in instigating and perpetuating racist stereotypes.

Traditional and Modern Racism

Traditional and modern racism differ more in form than in content. The content of both traditional and modern racism is the negative stereotypes, assumptions, and beliefs concerning minority populations. Both traditional and modern racism perpetuate structural systems that reproduce inequality concerning those who are deemed as "others"

and enable the possession of power by the dominant groups (van Dijk 1989). However, the way in which traditional and modern racism achieve this goal is different.

Traditional racism, also called old-fashioned or overt racism, includes beliefs in racial superiority, "negative and derisive affect, open denigration of minorities, segregation, and systemic discrimination" (August and Liu 2015:235). Rooted in the belief that individuals of different races were biologically different, laws were established in the United States explicitly denying minorities the same rights that were extended and guaranteed to the dominant group, namely, those who were deemed to be white. In order to keep the races "pure," the United States created laws that forbade the mixing of the races, called miscegenation (Myers 2005).

Such explicit rules, condoned and codified as laws by the United States, cannot stand in the contemporary atmosphere of color-blindness. Public expression of explicitly racist ideals is largely unacceptable in the post-civil rights era (Myers and Williamson 2001). Therefore, modern racism, also called symbolic or color-blind racism, is covert rather than overt; indirect rather than direct; subtle rather than open (August and Liu 2015; Myers and Williamson 2001; van Dijk 2000). Modern racism

> conceals negative affect while maintaining disparity by invoking egalitarian principles that deny structural disadvantages and position minorities as demanding special treatment or violating group norms (August and Liu 2015:235).

A typical instance of modern racism is one in which there is no overtly or obviously racist language explicitly stated but, nevertheless, belonging to a specific racial or ethnic minority group is derided or ridiculed (August and Liu 2015).

Subsequently, researchers have investigated coded racial language that, while seemingly innocent, upon closer analysis betrays its modern racist character. Both the role of the media in symbolic racist discourses and the symbolic discourses of private interactions have been studied (van Dijk 2000; Myers 2005). Through the media's portrayal of minorities in general, and African Americans in particular, the same stereotypes of traditional racism persist in contemporary times. Van Dijk (1989) identified several recurring racist images and stereotypes that the media associates with minorities, including violence, illegal activity in general, and crime. Heavy consumers of news programs give "more negative evaluations of Blacks than do lighter users" (Mastro et al. 2009). The media plays a large role, if not the main role, as the source of "people's knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, both of other elites and of ordinary citizens" (van Dijk 2000:36). Because of the media's historic role, I turn to the media's depiction of the iconic ghetto and some of the recurring images of the "grammar of race" that the media uses (Hall 1981:39).

The Iconic Ghetto and the Grammar of Race

The iconic ghetto is that feared, hostile geographic space where nothing good resides (Anderson 2012; Wacquant 2002). It is rife with poverty and illegal activities. The only things found there are dilapidated homes and lives. "Can anything good come from the ghetto?" is the assumed, recurrent question concerning these neighborhoods.

But through the media's depiction of the iconic ghetto, black Americans have become inextricably tied to the poverty, wanton violence and illegal activity of the

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ghetto. The ghetto is now identified as the locale in which blacks reside; in turn, it is assumed that all black people originally come from the ghetto. No matter what accolades they obtain, status they achieve or capital they possess, the underlying assumption is that all blacks originally start in the ghetto.

Blackness is a "master status-determining trait" (Hughes 1945:357), and the primary status credited to blacks in America is that of a ghetto person (Anderson 2015). This causes blacks to be relegated to the position of the "other" no matter where they are found in contemporary American life. Once iconic ghetto stereotypes become linked to black bodies, there comes to exist "a basic confusion between race and class; black skin is typically equated with lower-class status and white skin with privilege" (Anderson 2015:19). The negative associations that white Americans have with the iconic ghetto subsequently serve as a "rationalization for discrimination against black people" (Anderson 2015:13). This is the consequence of the role that the media has played in the propagation and furtherance of these stereotypes of African Americans and the ghetto lifestyle.

While Anderson and Wacquant describe the main features of the iconic ghetto, Stuart Hall analyzed movies and broadcast media in order to present what he calls the "base-images of the 'grammar of race'" (Hall 1981:39). Included is the *slave*, who is a devoted, lovable and naïve soul, but is nevertheless unpredictable and may betray his master; the *native*, who is identified by a mixture of noble character and dignity on the one hand and savagery and barbarism on the other; and the *clown or entertainer*, who possess an innate humor, and whom people both laugh with and laugh at (1981).

Betrayal, violence, savagery, and foolishness thus become the main adjectives used to describe African Americans in the United States.

Moving now from the media's complicit role in modern racism, several researchers have begun to examine discourse online in order to look for coded, symbolic, and color-blind racism in digital spaces. I now turn to an overview of this work.

Modern Racism in Digital Spaces

Researchers have begun to look more closely at race talk in this age of modern racism. Race talk is

> the explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African Americans to the lowest level of the racial hierarchy (Morrison 1993:57).

Much of the research on race talk uses surveys, interviews, written texts and speeches for data sources. However, these are all public forms of data. In contrast to this, Myers and Williamson (2001) analyzed private discourse and found that especially in these settings, people engaged in racially explicit language in order to categorize, rank, and degrade whoever was deemed to be the "other."

Likewise, in digital spaces, researchers have analyzed forums, as well as comments on news sites, in order to discover what racially coded discourse exists on these websites. Ronkin and Karn (1999) analyzed "mock Ebonics" websites that arose on the internet as part of an anti-Ebonic ideology. The mock Ebonics literature contained the same stereotypes associated with African Americans that the media portrayed: violent

tendencies, illegal activity, crime, and hyper-sexual behavior. August and Liu (2015),

analyzing the comments sections of several Youtube.com videos related to racially-

charged statements made by a New Zealand public figure, found a high degree of

hostility, the discursive tactic of denying racism in the face of quite racist views,

incivility, and the modern racist tactic of appealing to contemporary ideals of equality

and free speech. Similarly, as they analyzed comments on several news websites, Daniels

and Hughey (2013) found coded racial language and what they call common sense racism

as a cover and defense for racial language. Common sense racism acts as a defense

against charges of racism by appealing

> to supposedly race-neutral principles and/or…historically dominant and well-entrenched racial stereotypes that are collectively shared and rarely challenged. This defense occurs in three ways: (1) abstract arguments that invoke the individual's right to engage in "free speech," (2) accusations of victimhood that appeal to "political correctness," and (3) seemingly matter-of-fact statements that are based on implicit racial stereotypes and myths (2013:338).

This common-sense racism is also similar to what Bonilla-Silva (2003) outlines as

the four central frames of color-blind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural

racism, and the minimization of racism. *Abstract liberalism* involves the use of liberal

ideals to invoke equality while ignoring historical disparities between dominant and

minority peoples. In this way, individuals oppose, for example, affirmative action on the

grounds that everyone should have an equal chance at employment, education, etc.

Naturalization is the notion that, regarding the segregation of schools or

neighborhoods, that's "just the way things are." This is the belief that people who are like

one another will congregate together, and those who are not will not intermix. Again, this

ignores the historical realities of white flight and individuals actively resisting integration throughout American history.

Cultural Racism includes all common stereotypes or ways of living that are assumed to be cultural and normative for the entire population in question. This is the reproduction of historical myths and stereotypes in spite of evidence to the contrary.

Finally, the *minimization of racism* is, paradoxically, the only one of the four that willingly looks at history, but only in order to proudly proclaim, "Hey, things aren't as bad as they used to be!" Minimization strategies demand that minorities be glad for the progress they have made and stop asking for more changes. It also includes the insistence that, regarding overt racism and oppression, "We're past all that now" (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

The aforementioned studies that focused on individuals' comments were all conducted in digital spaces wherein the individuals did not see themselves as part of a collective group, such as the research on Youtube comments as well as on comments located in news websites. I move beyond the analysis of disparate individuals' comments to analyze comments on Imgur.com, where users self-consciously consider themselves to be part of a group, that is, part of the community of Imgur. In my content analysis of their comments, I show that their use of coded language (beyond topics of race) otherwise known as memetic phrases (Mazambani et al. 2015) or social steganography (boyd 2011) is only possible given the assumption of a community that will be able to interpret such coded language. To that end, I turn now to the final section of the literature review, focusing on SIDE Theory, memesis online, and white, masculine identities.

Memesis and SIDE Theory

Researchers have begun to note the prevalence of what boyd and Marwick call "social steganography" (2011). Steganography is the practice of hiding information in plain sight; the true message is obscured, and the way to access the message is only known to the sender and recipient of the message. boyd, through interviewing teenagers' use of Facebook, found that they engage in social steganography. They encoded messages so that only certain friends would understand them. Their messages were public (written as Facebook "statuses" or "wall posts,") but only certain friends who knew to look for hidden meanings and who had the ability to decipher them would understand them (boyd and Marwick 2011). Similarly, Julien (2015) sought to analyze "Internet Memes" by applying Bourdieu's framework to online interaction, highlighting the ways that common or public message are obscured or unintelligible to individuals online who do not possess the digital habitus necessary in order to fully comprehend specific Internet Memes. This is akin to the work of Mazambani et al. (2015) as they sought to analyze how memes spread in specific online forums. Memes are an integral part of online interaction; they are images, videos, often combined with text, that spread and can transform with subsequent reiterations; in short, they are inside jokes that shift as they are shared across vast networks (Shifman 2016).

In describing the ways that memes are spread in online spaces, Mazambani et al. (2015) point to the effects and importance of the individual as well as the group dynamics. Specifically, according to the social identity perspective, when individuals seek to be defined as members of a particular group, they define themselves in terms of

the group's identity and norms. They "depersonalize, or self-stereotype, in line with the group's prototypical norms" (Mazambani et al. 2015:150).

Because of the anonymity offered by the internet in many online communities, many researchers employ the social identification model of deindividuation effects, or SIDE Theory, in order to interpret behaviors online. According to this model, anonymity influences both group cohesion and the degree that individuals are attached to the group. This, in turn, increases the influence of group norms and the degree to which individuals identify as part of the group (Mazambani et al. 2015).

While researchers initially posited the internet to be a space wherein anonymity would increase anti-social behavior in general, studies using SIDE Theory have revealed that anonymous individuals will act in conformity with group norms when the *social* identity is salient, rather than *personal* identity. When the group's social identity is salient, anonymity increases the influence of the group on the individual's actions (Denegri-Knott and Taylor 2005; Mikal et al. 2014; Mikal et al. 2015). I contend that this is the case for Imgur.

For example, in their work on online forums Mazambani et al. (2015) hypothesized that low-status members would create relevant memes as a way to gain status and influence within the group. They found that low-status members were wildly successful in creating and spreading memes that were consistent with the group's salient identity. In other words, the low-status members perceived the salient group identity and acted within the group norms in order to be identified with the group and gain status in that particular online setting.

In my research, a similar phenomenon exists: on Imgur, individuals act in line with group norms so they can receive upvotes on their comments and gain the prestige associated with successfully employing relevant memes, thereby proving and reaffirming their participation in the group. But more than mere participation, responding appropriately to content on Imgur by receiving upvotes and favorable replies shows that the group at large has *accepted* the individual. I contend that not only do individuals act in this way on Imgur, but the group identity that is formed is one that aligns with previous research on white, masculine identities, since Imgur is an online space that is dominated by both whites and males. So, to conclude my literature review, I turn to recent research on white, masculine identities.

The Construction of White Masculinities

Hughey (2010; 2011; 2012) studied two groups of white Americans, one a white nationalist group and the other a white antiracist group, and found that both groups, while completely opposite in their aims and goals, engaged in similar race talk in order to establish appropriate norms, expectations and behaviors for their group. In the end, because they existed within the larger, dominant meanings of white masculinity, the two disparate groups produced "many of the essentialist and reactionary baggage historically connected with the particular identity" (Hughey 2011:150). Hughey concludes that white male discourse shows not only the continued existence of traditional, overt racism, but also shows how "racist discourse confers the status of particular kinds of whiteness and masculinity on their users" (2011:150). He argues that this hegemonic whiteness is

constructed both by delineating the ways that non-whites are inferior and positionally below whites, and by highlighting certain white activities that fail to live up to dominant, white ideals (Hughey 2010). In this way, hegemonic whiteness is constructed through both *inter*-racial distinctions and *intra*-racial distinctions.

First, pertaining to inter-racial distinctions, hegemonic whiteness is constructed through a perceived victimization of whiteness that causes frustration and anxiety. Whites feel victimized from the culture at large, as an ethos of color-blindness and politically-correct speech becomes normative. This victimization is only the first part of the inter-racial construction of hegemonic whiteness. The second inter-racial construction is identifying black pathologies and rooting them either in biology or culture. The former harkens back to traditional racism, while the latter finds its home in color-blind racism. Biological sources of black pathology rooted black people's vices in black bodies themselves. Conversely, color-blind racism understands *cultural* troubles as the primary cause of contemporary black people's problems.

The final aspect of the inter-racial construction of white hegemonic identities Hughey calls "white debt" (2010). This involves whites appropriating customs and other cultural artifacts that were previously understood to be "non-white," claiming them as their own. This includes using relationships with black people as an excuse against charges of racism, as well as a means to overcome the perceived blandness of whiteness. There is a general dullness, a boring quality, and physical, emotional, & sexual impotency associated with whiteness in America. Whites overcome this "white debt" by claiming non-white cultural artifacts and traditions as their own.

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In addition to these three inter-racial means that whites use to construct hegemonic whiteness, there are several *intra*-racial distinctions that whites use to establish the boundaries of an idealized whiteness and separate it from a sub-standard whiteness. These differing understandings of whiteness hinge not on "colour, bodily features, or even political views, but…[on] culturally hegemonic ideals and power" (Hughey 2010:1301). He identifies three strands of intra-racial distinctions: affective whiteness, conscious whiteness, and simplistic whiteness.

Affective whiteness pertains to the expected emotional responses corresponding to various white identities. Different white identities prize different emotional responses, so that certain feelings and expressions thereof are normative, while any other emotions expressed constitute an inferior or compromised whiteness. The second intra-racial distinction is conscious whiteness. This is the belief that there are some individuals who can "see through" racial propaganda, knowing what is truly going on. This further enables different white identities to distinguish between an idealized and inferior or co-opted whiteness. The final intra-racial distinction is simplistic whiteness, which prides itself in a straightforward, "simple" understanding of race and race relations that is not encumbered by complex, convoluted theories. Instead, simple explanations reign supreme (Hughey 2010). On Imgur, I find many of the same inter- and intra-racial distinctions among the comments that Imgurians write, as competing white racial identities compete for dominance.

This concludes my review of the relevant literature. I turn now to the methods employed in gathering, analyzing, and discussing the images and comments of Black Twitter on Imgur.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

What are the Main Features of Black Twitter on Imgur?

I look first at uncovering a deeper understanding of the architecture of Imgur so as to understand the constraints and possibilities of the interface. Then, I analyze at the most popular albums of Black Twitter images on Imgur and sort the images into various categories. I will now, in turn, describe the various constituent parts of this methodology concerning my first research question.

An Analysis of the Website Architecture

I describe and analyze the specific affordances and capabilities offered to individuals as they use Imgur. I uncover the precise ways in which the form of the website, the interface that greets each user, has perpetuated the themes of my research, namely, racial stereotypes, white masculinities, and color-blind spaces. Additionally, I will compare the architecture of Imgur to that of Twitter, thereby illuminating the ways in which the content has shifted and been shaped as it has migrated, or transmediated, from Twitter to Imgur.

Popular Albums of Black Twitter

Content on Imgur is sorted not by views but by how many "upvotes" the album has received. I look at the most popular albums because these albums contain the content that is the most well-received by the individuals on Imgur. If the content of these albums was not perceived to be Black Twitter, individuals would have expressed their displeasure at the incorrect title of the album. Subsequently, the album would not have been able to reach the "front page" of Imgur, as explained below.

The most common way to view posts on Imgur is to browse the "front page." These posts are seen by the majority of the community on Imgur. In this way, looking at the most popular albums of Black Twitter guarantees that a large number of people have seen the album, voted on it, and commented on it. If I had looked at albums or images of Black Twitter that were not upvoted, there would be insufficient data to draw reliable conclusion about Black Twitter images. In many instances, it is simply the case that less than 50 people voted or saw these images. Therefore, because these "unpopular" albums are not seen by many individuals, there are typically few comments on this content, if any at all. This means that the data on unpopular Black Twitter posts has much less potential to be the rich data that can produce thick descriptions of Imgurians' interactions. So, while there would be some merit in looking at these "least popular" albums, what is of interest are those albums that are commented on and seen by a vast majority of the individuals on Imgur, rather than only a handful.

I demonstrate the stability of these albums in the following ways. I only analyzed albums that were uploaded in weeks or months prior to my observation of them, so they

were not on the front page at that time. This meant that there were hardly any new

viewers, voters, or commenters to change my data. To confirm this, I tracked three Black

Twitter albums over six months and found incredible stability of views, total album

votes, number of comments, and the upvotes of the top comments. Tables 4 through 7 in

Appendix A detail this.

Therefore, looking at older, popular albums assures that a) the content of these

albums is stable and unchanging b) the albums are understood by Imgurians to be

representative of Black Twitter, c) a mass of individuals has upvoted and commented on

the albums, and d) therefore the content in these albums is the content that is not only

well-received by the community but also is viewed by the majority of the community,

providing the greatest potential for rich data.

A Typology of the Images

I sort the images into various thematic categories. The themes of the categories

are derived primarily from Anderson's (2012) and Wacquant's (2002) descriptions of the

iconic ghetto, but will also include concepts and characterizations from the works of

Bobo (2014), Hall (1981), and Labov (2010). However, the typology is not so rigid that it

does not adapt or include unforeseen elements that present themselves in the Black

Twitter images. Through this categorization, I organize the images of Black Twitter in

order to answer my first question: what comprises the content of Black Twitter on Imgur.

The images are sorted not only by looking at the image itself, but also the text that

accompanies each image, for each Black Twitter image has text either above it, below it,

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or directly on the image itself. This involves what Pauwels (2010:557) calls "interpretative decoding" because I look at not only the people and places of the image itself, but also the text that is paired with that image. It is precisely the combination of a specific text and a specific image that qualifies an image as Black Twitter; therefore, the image and text are taken as an integrated whole, inseparably bound together.

I approach the images of Black Twitter on Imgur as already existing visual data, called "found" visuals (Pauwels 2010). In this sense, I do not ask participants to create any new material at my behest; instead, I analyze data that the participants generated of their own volition. In fact, I access these publicly available data without the users' knowledge. Because of this, my presence as a researcher is unnoticed and unknown, which minimized to null the risk of my presence altering the behavior of the individuals on Imgur. In this sense, their behavior is considered to be naturally occurring and spontaneous; it is done by the will of the individual on Imgur without provocation from any researcher, and indeed, it would have been done if I had not observed it (Pauwels 2010). However, in light of this covert data collection, I have taken great care to anonymize the data. I have anonymized Imgurian's usernames, and I have not recorded or included which specific Black Twitter albums I analyzed for my research.

How do Imgurians respond to Black Twitter?

There are two stages of analysis with regard to this research question. First, I look at the comments (which are written on the album itself) and replies (which are comments that respond to other comments) of the most popular Black Twitter albums and conduct

an initial categorization of the comments. Then, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of this written content, using the purposeful sampling techniques of typical case sampling, critical case sampling and criterion sampling to find relevant comments (Patton 1987 2002). In this way, the first stage of analysis allows me to draw conclusions about the kinds of typical, "normal" responses on Black Twitter Albums, and the second stage of analysis allows for deeper analysis and richer conclusions about the symbolic racism present and white masculine identities formed on Imgur.

Thematic Content Analysis

In order to provide rich, thick descriptions of interactions on Imgur, I use the purposeful sampling techniques of typical case sampling, critical case sampling, criterion sampling and theoretical sampling to search for suitable comments on viral Black Twitter albums. These techniques allow me to focus on the issues of central importance for my research questions and themes of analysis (Patton 2002). All cases that I selected have been anonymized, so that no users can be identified by their pseudonymous usernames on Imgur. These sampling techniques are described below.

Through typical case sampling I select those cases that are typical or normal for a given behavior or sentiment voiced. Typical cases are illustrative of what a given group routinely expresses, and serves as a baseline for other, atypical or unusual behaviors. This technique, therefore, enables me to highlight what is within the typical, average or normal range of responses of individuals to Black Twitter Albums.

In critical case sampling, I look for cases that dramatically, thoroughly, or extensively convey an argument that is paramount for my research questions. Through this technique, I can make generalization and applications to other cases since "if it's true of this one case, it's likely to be true of all other cases" (Patton 2002:243). Determining critical cases is achieved not only through observing upvotes and downvotes, which indicate popularity and level of acceptance by the community, but also through the ensuing discussions. Therefore, ideal critical case samples are those which have not only received a fair number of votes (whether positive or negative) but also those that have resulted in a thorough discussion and dialogue in response to the initial comment.

With criterion sampling, I gather the cases that meet specific criteria, such as the use of Ebonics, memetic phrases, gendered language, and derogatory slurs. Then, I am able to draw conclusions about these specific expressions as well as evaluate how the community reacts to them (Patton 1987; 2002).

Finally, through theoretical sampling I select cases on the basis of the emergent manifestations of the overarching concepts and theories that drive my inquiry, namely, the iconic ghetto, color-blind racism, and white masculinities. Theoretical sampling allows for clarification of the meanings of the concepts of my research as I gather and interpret the data (Patton 2002). In this way, there is a back-and-forth dialogue between what is found in the data and the predominant concepts of my research, each refining the other and allowing for better selections of cases as I continue the research.

These techniques allow me to identify and understand memetic phrases, images and gifs, since understanding a particular communities' memes requires a deep context

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analysis and familiarization with the common phrases and exchanges that are prevalent

therein. van Dijk (2000) calls the interpretation of these local meanings "semantic

analysis." Because Imgur enforces a maximum character limit of 140, Imgurians cannot

easily write paragraphs to express their thoughts, which would constitute a more

"syntactic" analysis (van Dijk 2000). My goal in this content and discourse analysis is

aptly stated by Daniels & Hughey, (2013):

> Not only must new methodologies be racially literate, but scholarly approaches
> must outline the grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic strategies for constructing
> racial in- and out-groups based on subtle insinuations of "authentic" belonging,
> superiority, and/or normality (338).

Group Identification

Through my content and discourse analysis of the comments and replies, I

demonstrate that Imgurians write their comments in light of their sense of belonging to

the online community of Imgur. They respond as part of a group. As previously

discussed, deindividuation theory posits that anonymous computer-mediated

communication fosters group identification as well as awareness of the pertinent norms of

a social category or group (Mikal et al. 2015; cf. Mazambani et al. 2015). Through

analyzing Imgurians' comments, I find many kinds of recurring, memetic responses. This

supports the hypothesis that Imgurians who comment are aware of salient group norms

and respond in kind, seeking to be counted as a member of the group and therefore

allowing the group norms to shape the expression of their own (Mazambani et al. 2015).

My goal in applying SIDE Theory, is summed up well by Hughey (2011):

…there remains a fundamental charge for the sociological study of white masculinity: to evaluate why and how groups of white men, across varied contexts, make meaning of race and understand it as a salient category of human difference (133).

Therefore, from categorizing and analyzing the comments and replies on Black Twitter albums, I answer my second research question and discern how the individuals on Imgur respond to Black Twitter and what their responses show about white masculinities and color-blind racism in digital spaces.

CHAPTER IV

IMGUR'S AFFORDANCES AND HEGEMONY

While I have previously given a general overview of Imgur's interface as it appears to the individual user, I will now elaborate on the specific ways in which this interface contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic perspectives. Because of its distinct interface, the way that users approach, understand, and interact with content on Imgur is different from other websites such as Twitter or Reddit. Because of Imgur's historical affinity with Reddit and similarity of content with Twitter, I will compare and contrast Imgur with these websites throughout this analysis.

Approaching Content: The Front Page Effect

When users visit or log into Imgur, they are greeted by the Front Page. The Front Page contains content that has received at least 300 upvotes from users. This content is called "Most Viral" and is organized by this concept of "virality," which is not defined by Imgur but is understood to involve, primarily, the variables of popularity and time. That is, content that has received hundreds or thousands of upvotes more recently will be ranked higher on the Front Page. Therefore, the Front Page is organized by popular sentiment and prioritizes recent popularity, cycling content through the Front Page daily. The Front Page has, then, the semblance of democratic equality in how it is organized.

The images found on the Front Page have been deemed worthy of presentation *by* Imgur

users *for* the wider Imgur community.

When users upload images to Imgur, they are uploaded to the "User Submitted"

page. This page is organized only by time submitted, rather than popularity. Browsing

User Submitted (or User Sub for short) is seen as risky, daring, yet commendable

behavior by Imgurians; they often thank those who browse User Sub for their service in

bringing "quality content" to the community as a whole. It is perceived as a service

because some content that is uploaded to User Sub violates Imgur's Terms of Service and

might slip past the checks in place to catch such content.

For this reason, staff members must browse through User Sub and delete any

content that is not initially caught. Imgur even posts a warning when an individual first

enters User Sub to warn him of the possibility of seeing pornographic, offensive, or

violent content:

> User Submitted is Imgur's diamond mine, where brand new posts are shared by
> Imgurians in real time. You may run into some questionable posts in this section
> that don't belong on Imgur. If you see anything that could be pornographic,
> mature and not marked as such, abusive, spammy, or that otherwise doesn't
> belong on Imgur, feel free to use the report option to flag it. Your reports help to
> make Imgur a better place.

The Front Page is composed of content that does not violate the Terms of Service

has received 300 upvotes; there is no further qualification needed for content to move

from being classified as User Submitted content to Front Page content. This means that

the content that espouses the majority's views, perspectives, humor and proclivities will

routinely be sent to the Front Page while content of any dissenting, minority's views and

opinions will not be. What Imgur creates, through this simplistic method, is a continual reaffirmation of whatever the status quo may be. As mentioned earlier, Imgur is majority white (85%) and male (83%) (Mikal et al. 2015). Therefore, the interests expressed are routinely those of the majority culture, the viewpoints that already possess cultural hegemony.

The Front Page is an expression, then, of the collective will of Imgur. Users cannot effectively curate the content they see on Imgur, as is typical practice on Twitter and Reddit. The Front Page of Imgur is simply given. More recently, Imgur has given users the option to select a broad category that might align with their interests; the posts that appear in these categories have been "tagged" accordingly by the user who uploaded the album (so that all posts in the "Funny" category have been tagged as "funny"). But, many users do not tag their posts with anything, and so users still regularly choose to browse the Front Page rather than specific categories.

One final aspect of the Front Page of Imgur is worth noting before moving to a comparison of the affordances of other social media websites: Imgur *itself* is an image-hosting website, which means that it does not prioritize links to outside sources. While it is possible for users to include links to other websites, because the content posted to Imgur has been uploaded to Imgur itself, users tend to remain on the website rather than being sent to outside websites. This contributes to the insular nature of communication on Imgur and the object of investigation, Black Twitter on Imgur, in the following way: the images posted in Black Twitter albums are not *links* to the websites of the images, whether they were Tumblr, Facebook, or Twitter. The users on Imgur, effectively, have

no guaranteed way to trace these images back to their sources. Instead, the images they see are unique pictures, either downloaded or taken as a screenshot and uploaded to Imgur. This means that the original context of Black Twitter images, and other posts on Imgur, is lost and unknown to Imgurians.

This is the primary way that Black Twitter images transmediate from Twitter to Imgur, with the ramification that they are wholly decontextualized, repossessed in a white, male-dominated digital space. The original intent of the images on Twitter is lost; what matters is the reception and perception *of Imgurians* to the images.

For some posts on the Front Page, there are dissenting voices that question, "how did this reach the Front Page?", but often such comments are downvoted, another example of the dominance of the majority on Imgur. It is worth contrasting the Front Page of Imgur with the content on both Reddit and Twitter in order to see Imgur's unique organization of its content and the subsequent consequences for community orientation toward hegemonic beliefs and perspectives.

Content on Reddit and Twitter

While the default page on Reddit is also known as the "Front Page," content on Reddit is primarily organized around forums called subreddits. Subreddits are named forums in which all content pertains to the topic of the forum. They are moderated by volunteers who have an interest in the topic of the forum. Users on Reddit (called Redditors) subscribe to specific subreddits and receive notifications when there are updates and new posts written in their subreddits. In this way, content on Reddit is

organized around each user's specific interests and tastes, since they only receive updates

about the subreddits to which they have subscribed. They are able to visit the Front Page

of Reddit, which contains a feed of the top posts of the day across dozens of subreddits,

but it is more common for users to simply read and interact with their subscribed

subreddits, since these represent their specific interests (Massanari 2015).

Although it is not organized around forums as Reddit is, Twitter bears a likeness

to Reddit rather than Imgur in that Twitter organizes content around a user's preferences

and who they have "followed." Users on Twitter follow specific users, which can be

persons, organizations, or companies. When they log in, users see a list of recent "tweets"

from whoever they follow. This is updated in real time as the user stays on Twitter,

emphasizing Twitter's conversational ethos. In this way, the content that confronts users

on Twitter is curated by the users themselves, and can be hidden and adjusted at will.

Below is an example of the home page of Twitter:
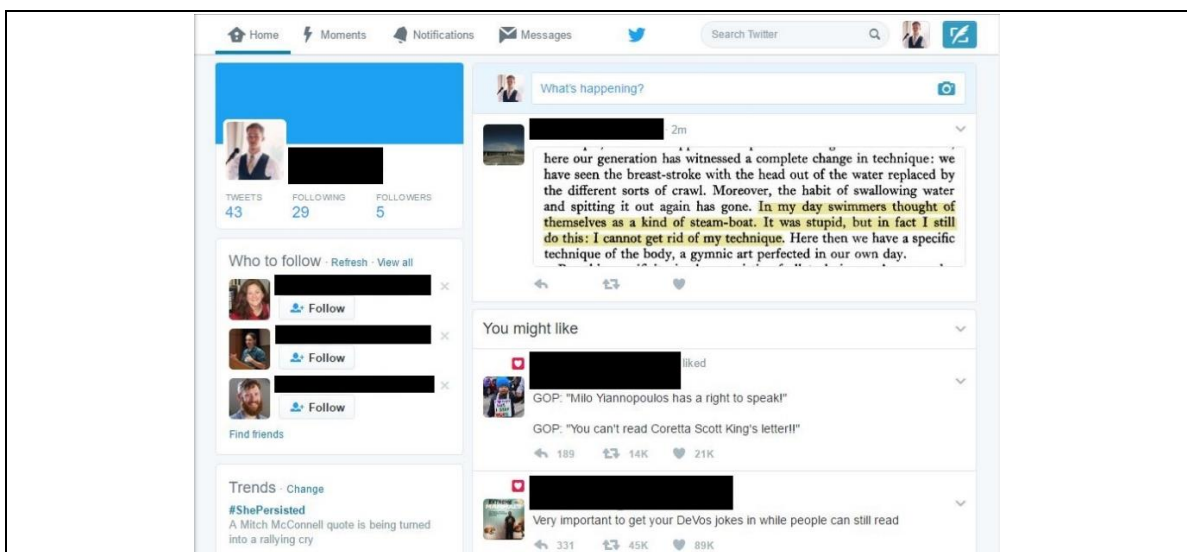
Figure 2. A Twitter Home Page

Users also have the ability to "retweet" any tweet from another user. By retweeting content, the original user is credited with his or her tweet, but the tweet is posted to the user's own Twitter page. Therefore, retweeting content brings that content to a new network of users; that is, whoever follows the user who just engage in a "retweet." Below is an example of a Twitter profile page, a tweet, and a retweet:
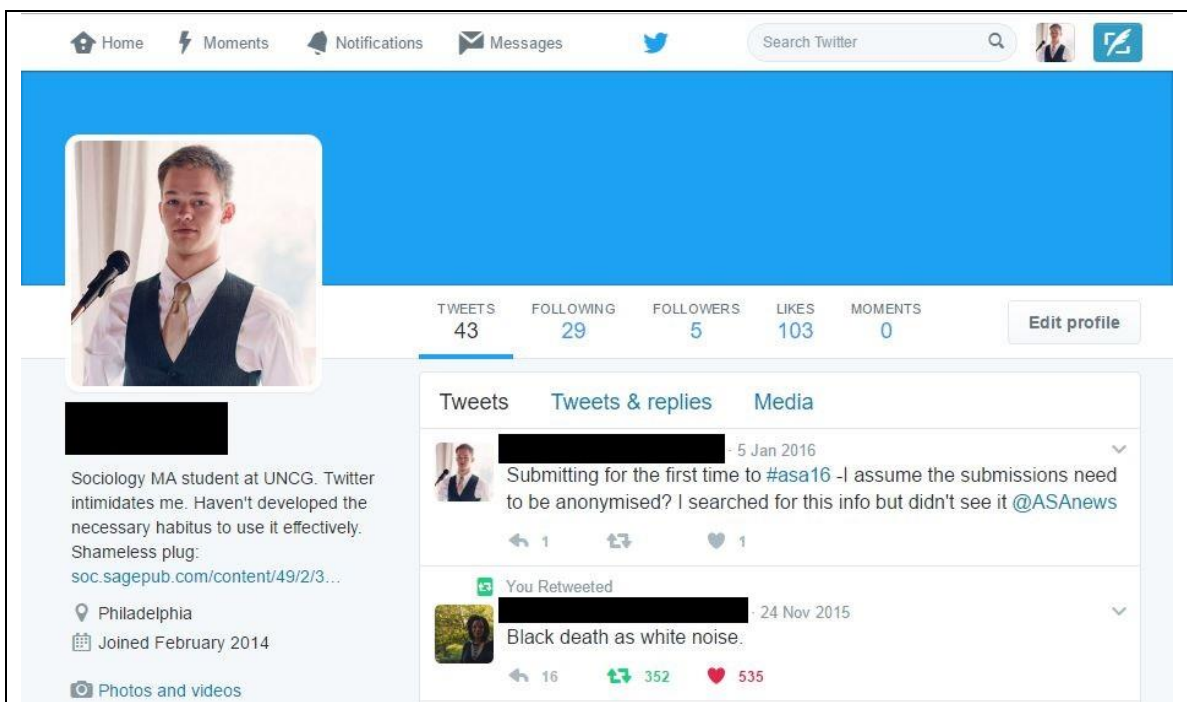
Figure 3. A Twitter Profile Page

This is how content spreads across Twitter; users retweet content they agree with or want to discuss, sharing content across weak ties that potentially link that content to new networks of actors (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010; Freelon and Karpf 2014; Granovetter 1973; Kwak et al. 2010).

Additionally, Twitter users employ "hashtags" to mark specific tweets and link them to larger conversations (Sharma 2013). By clicking a specific hashtag, users are taken to a new page which loads all tweets that are marked by that hashtag. Rather than Reddit's stable forums moderated by users, Twitter's hashtags are emergent, fluid and open to anyone who wishes to join, either through simply reading or by responding with a reply or tweet of their own while using the specific hashtag (Sharma 2013).

Content on Imgur: The Role of Profile Pages

Users do have unique accounts on Imgur, but users cannot "follow" other Imgur users as they do on Twitter. The content on Imgur is not organized around specific users. While it is possible to see a user's profile page and their recent comments, there is no way to follow that user or bring their content to your own profile page. Critically, the content on Imgur is not *able* to be organized around profile pages; this stems from the decisions of the creators of Imgur to implement certain potentialities within the interface of Imgur. It is this specific techno-social assemblage which inhibits certain kinds of relations and interactions and enables others, giving shape to Imgur as a unique online community (van Dijck 2013). Below is a profile page on Imgur:
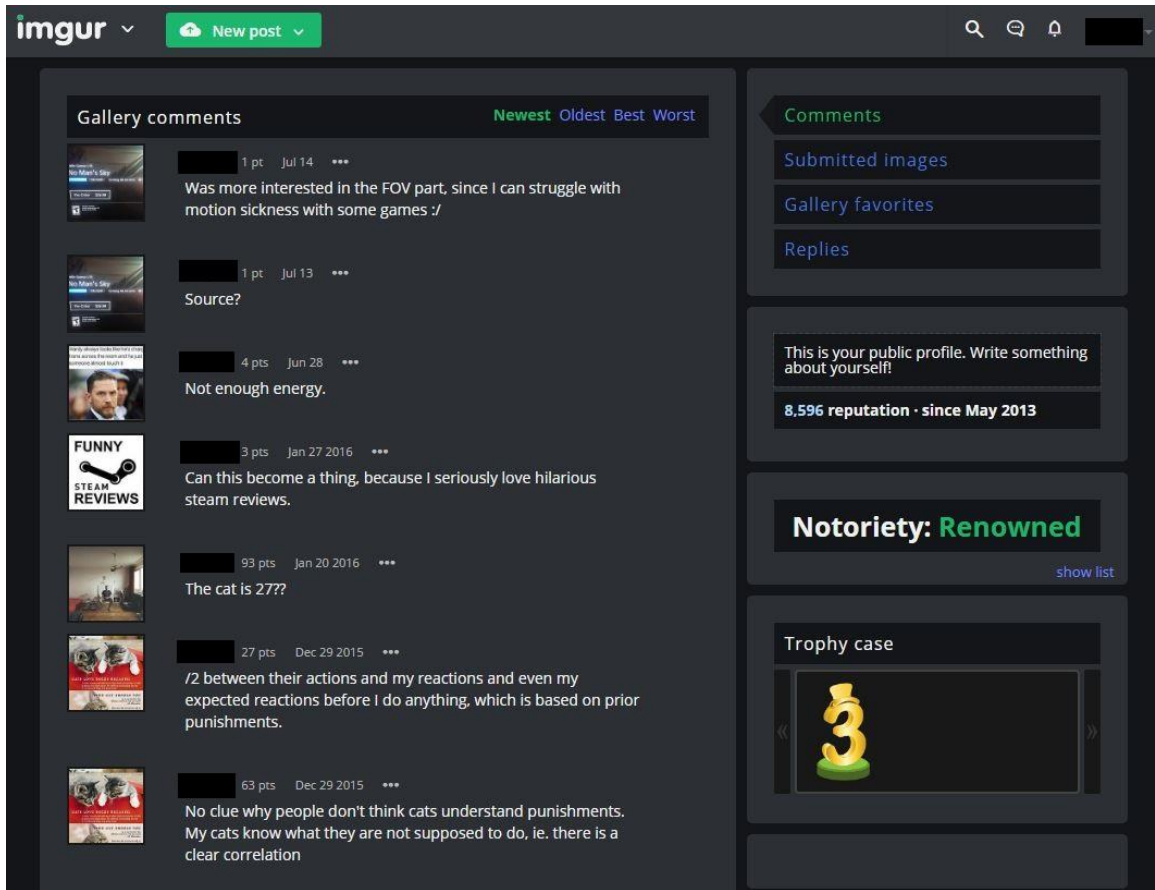
Figure 4. An Imgur Profile Page

As just discussed, retweeting content on Twitter brings that content to your own

page, highlighting its importance to you and moving the conversation to your own

profile. No such ability for prioritizing content can occur on Imgur. While users can see a

specific user's previous comments and themselves comment on them, there is no

potential for highlighting content and continuing specific dialogues as on Twitter. If

someone does comment on another user's comment, no other users are notified about this

updated conversation; *only* the original commenter knows that they have received a reply.

In other words, from that interaction only one person is notified, as opposed to the entire network of followers when a retweet occurs on Twitter.

Profile pages on Twitter show the content that is understood to be important to the user, and when hashtags are used anyone can see these public conversations and dialogues. There is no corollary for continuing group discussion on Imgur. In summation, Imgur's interface fosters *individual* dialogue, while Twitter's fosters *community* discussion. But this is just the beginning of the ways that Imgur prioritizes the reproduction of individual, popular and hegemonic content as opposed to potentially diverse and empowering discussions.

What's in a Comment? Interface Decisions on Imgur

Comments on Imgur are bounded in several ways. To comment on a post, an individual must have an account with Imgur. This is free and only requires an email address. No other demographic information is required and, unlike Facebook, users need not link their account to any "real" person or organization. The username chosen can be anything, as long as it does not violate the community's terms of service. Once users have created an account, they are able to comment on any post. Comments can only be 140 characters or less. In this way, Imgur mirrors Twitter exactly, which also requires that its users tweet in 140 characters or less. If they wish to write longer comments, Imgurians have developed the shorthand of typing "/1", "/2", etc. in the front or back of their comments so that others can follow along in the correct order.

By itself, this constraint to such a low number of characters would make discussion difficult. One way Twitter overcomes this constraint and keeps their emphasis on discussion is by enabling their users to reply to and retweet messages, as previously discussed. However, Imgur grants its users no opportunity to prioritize comments and discussion the way Twitter does. While Imgurians can directly message others and reply to others' comments, they are not able to prioritize comments. While the comments are an important part of interaction on Imgur, the main content on Imgur remains the images and gifs that are posted to the site. For this reason, Imgur has prioritized actions around the images and gifs that users *post*, rather than comments that users *write*.

For example, *images* on Imgur can be upvoted, downvoted, favorited, downloaded, reported, or embedded and shared on other social media websites. "Favoriting" an image saves that image to the user's profile, so that they and others can access them at a later time, though many users have noted that they rarely go back and view their favorites. This may be due to the overwhelming volume of new images that are uploaded to Imgur every day; there is no impetus to view favorites when fresh content is always available. These options provided to the user are all readily available at the bottom of every post, as shown below:
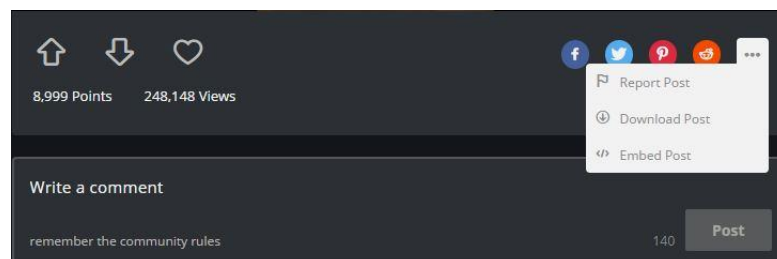
Figure 5. Potential Interactions with Content
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In contrast, *comments* on Imgur can only be upvoted, downvoted, and replied to. Although users have asked for comments to be able to be "favorited," this has not been implemented by Imgur's staff. In this way, Imgur prioritizes the images and gifs posted to the site rather than the comments. Dialogue is not prized on Imgur; content is.

Because of this, "original" content is praised, and "reposts" are anathema. If content has already been seen on Imgur and a user posts it again, many users will comment, complaining that the content is "a repost," and downvote it so that it cannot appear on the Front Page. In fact, many users will find the original post on Imgur and comment with a link to the original, thereby encouraging people to upvote the original and downvote the repost. Quick, original, entertaining images and gifs are the hallmarks of a good day on Imgur. Reposts, in contrast, bring the ire of the masses.

This emphasis on content rather than comments is important because the comments shape the collective voice and self-understanding of the community. Imgur's voice emerges not only in what images are posted, but also what is written by active users on the website. However, because of Imgur's interface and the potentialities of what users can do within comments, hegemonic views reign supreme and dissenting views are given little representation or opportunity to be understood.

The comments represent a contested space where Imgurians discuss what is acceptable on Imgur (such as "original" vs. "reposted" content) and in the broader world. Yet, because Imgur has constrained the comments so that they retain a place of secondary importance, diversity of viewpoints is stifled on Imgur. The majority, those who can garner more upvotes, take the lead, with their comments appearing near the top of a given

post. For the final way that Imgur prioritizes consensus and homogeneity over disagreement and diversity is through the *organization* of the comments.

Comment Sorting

Best, Top, and New

Comments on Imgur can be sorted three different ways: Best, Top, and New. The options of Best and Top are determined by upvotes and downvotes. The option of New is determined by time: more recent comments are shown first, near the top of the page. The default, however, is for comments to be sorted by Best. If users do not choose another option, then the comments will be sorted by Best.

The Best and Top options for sorting comments differ in the following way. Best are those comments that have garnered the most upvotes *and* the least downvotes. In other words, they are the most popular comments that also are not controversial. Top comments, on the other hand, have not only a high number of upvotes but may also have a high number of downvotes. This means that while the opinion expressed therein is accepted and upvoted by many people, it is potentially far more controversial, if it has been downvoted by a large number of people.

For example, if the comments were sorted by Best, the highest comment on the page, Comment A, could have 1000 points (1000 upvotes and 0 downvotes) while the 2nd highest comment on the page, Comment B, could have 1100 points (1200 upvotes and 100 downvotes). If the comments were then switched to being sorted by Top, Comment B, with 1100 points, would become the highest comment, and Comment A, with 1000

points, would become the 2nd highest comment. Therefore, the default option for sorting comments on Imgur prioritizes uncontroversial comments. Controversy and disagreeable comments are not rewarded in Imgur's upvote economy. Because the default ranking for comments is Best, Imgur eases the path for users to consume the most popular and least controversial comments, encouraging hegemony and discouraging disagreement.

Scoring Comments

When a user writes a comment, that comment begins with 1 point, which represents the author's own upvote. Each user on Imgur can only give one upvote or one downvote to each post and comment. That is, a user may not repeatedly upvote one comment in order to inflate its rating or push it to a higher position within a given post. Additionally, a user may not upvote and downvote the same comment. This means that the score seen on a given comment or post is the summation of upvotes minus downvotes, where each vote represents a unique individual. While users could theoretically create multiple accounts and so skew scores slightly, little to no evidence exists for such behavior. Furthermore, a few extra upvotes or downvotes would have negligible effect on comments with scores in the hundreds and thousands, which is a regular occurrence for top comments on the Front Page.

However, when a comment reaches -1, it becomes "hidden." If such a comment is a reply to another comment, it becomes located at the bottom of all replies to that given comment and a link must be clicked for it to be shown. The link reads, "Show bad

replies." This is the 2nd and main way that controversy and disagreement are not

rewarded or valued in Imgur's upvote economy. An example of this is shown below:
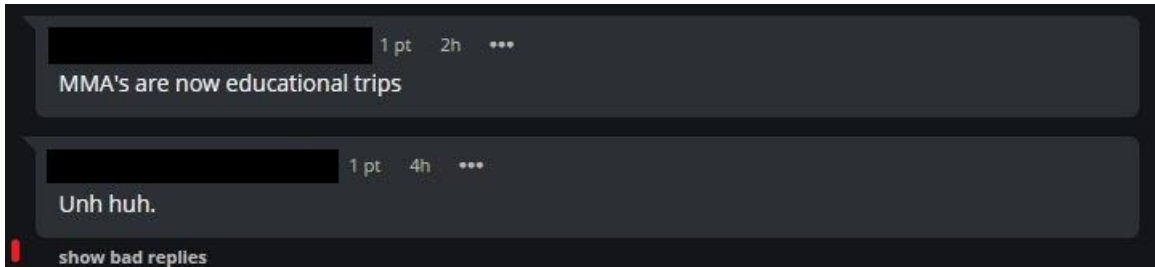
Figure 6. Bad Replies Hidden Underneath a Comment

Figure 7. Bad Replies Shown Underneath a Comment

The same is true of comments that are written on the main post, rather than

underneath another comment; "bad" comments written on posts are pushed to the bottom

of all the comments on that given post. These comments are hidden by the same link,

reading "Show bad replies," that must be clicked to read them.

Imgur makes no attempt to hide the value statement seen in the label given to

comments that are downvoted into the negatives: "bad" comments. Good comments are

those that are upvoted, those which the majority of Imgurians find agreeable. By labeling

negatively-valued comments "bad," the website of Imgur communicates a moral

hierarchy that tells users what ought to be normative discourse on Imgur.

Furthermore, Imgur rewards those who have reached certain overall scores with a

"medallion," though this only appears on a user's profile page and so is not a prominently

visible part of a user's experience on Imgur. Nevertheless, Imgur's hierarchy of upvote

tiers rewards Imgurians who have a desire to write comments that will be approved by

the community and garner upvotes, rather than write comments that are controversial.

Controversial comments are not rewarded by this tier of scores, and in fact downvotes

detract from a user's pool of Reputation Points. The tiers of Reputation Points are seen in

Figure 8:

Figure 8. Imgur's Upvote Tiers

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The bonus medallions listed have specific names attached to them, and they are granted at intervals of 10,000 "Reputation Points," with the final medallion, called "Imgurite,"" granted when the user surpasses 80,000 points. These "Reputation Points" are identical to the scores on comments and content, with a conversion ratio of +1 upvote to +1 Reputation Point and -1 downvote to -1 Reputation Point.

Imgur's Affordances: Conclusion

The prioritized content on Imgur is the images and gifs uploaded to the site that achieve Front Page status. There is a constant, daily influx of new content that users view, upvote, and comment on. This means the comments section is only given secondary importance, as prioritized by the interface. While many users value the comments section, conversing and heatedly debating in this area, they are given little control over their comments. Hashtags written in the comments section reference *images* tagged with those specific hashtags, rather than *comments*. There is, therefore, no way to group comments, thematically or otherwise. Comments cannot be favorited or otherwise "saved" for later dialogue or prioritization, while the images posted can be favorited and shared to other social media websites. Comments, which shape the collective voice of Imgur, have their potential stunted by the constraints of the interface.

Furthermore, the simple voting system on Imgur determines the value of posts and comments. Whereas on many Reddit forums the moderators have written suggestions for why Redditors ought to upvote and downvote a given post, for example by suggesting that disagreeing with a person's comment is not a sufficient reason for downvoting it

because this reduces fruitful discussion of opposing viewpoints, no such guidelines exist in readily accessible locations on Imgur. Instead, when a comment accumulates two more downvotes than upvotes, that comment is deemed "bad" and it is hidden. This means that controversial viewpoints, which may indicate a substantially-sized minority's opinion, are hidden and relegated to secondary status by the rules that govern the interface of Imgur. More than being hidden, they are also labeled as "bad," communicating a moral hierarchy that shapes what is considered to be normative and proper discourse on Imgur.

All of these decisions made by those that oversee and control the interface of Imgur come to bear on the ways that individuals are able to interact on Imgur. The content, comprised of images and gifs, are the prioritized focus of the website, with the comments relegated to a status of secondary importance. Disagreeable or controversial opinions are not valued, since users have no way to quickly view these comments and instead are presented with comments that are deemed to be the "Best," those with the most upvotes and least downvotes. Therefore, the upvote is the currency of status and acceptance on Imgur. The majority's views will always be the credible voice heard on Imgur. On Imgur, what is popular is legitimate.

CHAPTER V

THE IMAGES OF STEREOTYPE AND RACE

Introduction

I find that the images of Black Twitter albums on Imgur reproduce the iconic ghetto stereotypes. In these images, I find the general cultural stereotypes of black people as criminals, lazy, violent, drunk, poor, and uneducated; the stereotypes particular to black men as sexual and violent predators who are absent from their children's lives; and the stereotypes specifically about black women as domineering, sexually promiscuous, and avaricious. These stereotypes all work to reify racial boundaries, leading Imgurians to imbibe racist sentiments of generations past. I contend that one format of Black Twitter images in particular does so profoundly, the category called "White Twitter vs. Black Twitter."

Finally, there are a few images that make their way into Black Twitter albums on Imgur that seem out of place: odd, political statements that have neither a debasing, dehumanizing scorn for African Americans nor the levity that the rest of Black Twitter images possess. These few images are remnants of the serious, political discussions that occur on Black Twitter on Twitter. They go unnoticed on Imgur; no users comment on their appearance. These will be the last images I investigate in my analysis of Black Twitter on Imgur; I call these images the Political Turned Entertainment.

Below is a list of the major (**bolded**) and minor (*italicized*) categories of my findings, which roughly follow Hughey's categories (2011). The total codes allotted to each major and minor theme can be found in Tables 8 and 9 in Appendix A. What follows is a description and analysis of these themes, and the images that accompany them.

Cultural Racism: Black People
As Lazy
As Violent
As Drunkards
As Glutinous
As Poor
As Uneducated
Value Low Culture
Drug Use & Knowledge
Use Ebonics
Mocking Other Races
Mocking White People
As Criminals

Black Men
As Violent Predators
As Sexual Predators
As Disinterested Romantically
As Absent Fathers
As Emasculated

Black Women
As Domineering
As Promiscuous
As Avaricious

Type: Black Comedian & Slave
Political Turned Entertainment
White Twitter vs. Black Twitter

Cultural Racial Stereotypes

By far, the most common images on Black Twitter contain what could be called general cultural racial stereotypes about African Americans. Nearly half of the total allotted codes were found in this major theme (251 out of 568 codes allotted). These stereotypes are powerful assumptions about what it means to be black in America, including general poverty, drug use, a scorn for education, and what Daniels and Hughey call "common sense" racism (2013). These images do not have as their focus either black men or women specifically, but black people in general as one monolithic community. In this way, these images reify stereotypes and stigmas about the black community as a whole.

I created twelve minor themes to categorize the images that fall under the major theme Cultural Racial Stereotypes. I furthered organized these twelve codes into thematic groupings, simply for ease of discussion: *The Vices* (which includes Blacks as Lazy, Violent, Drunkards, Glutinous, and Poor); *Streetwise* (which includes Blacks as Uneducated, Value Low Culture, Drug Use & Knowledge, Ebonics, Mocking Other Races and Mocking White People); and *Blacks as Criminals*. These minor categories and the number of images coded with each can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Cultural Racism Minor Categories

Cultural Racism: *Minor* Category Codings

Category	Value
Blacks: Lazy	4
Blacks: Violent	6
Blacks: Drunkards	8
Blacks: Glutinous	5
Blacks: Poor	16
Blacks: Uneducated	31
Blacks: Value Low Culture	37
Blacks: Drug Use & Knowledge	22
Blacks: Use Ebonics	45
Blacks: Mock Other Races	36
Blacks: Mock White People	31
Blacks: Criminals	11
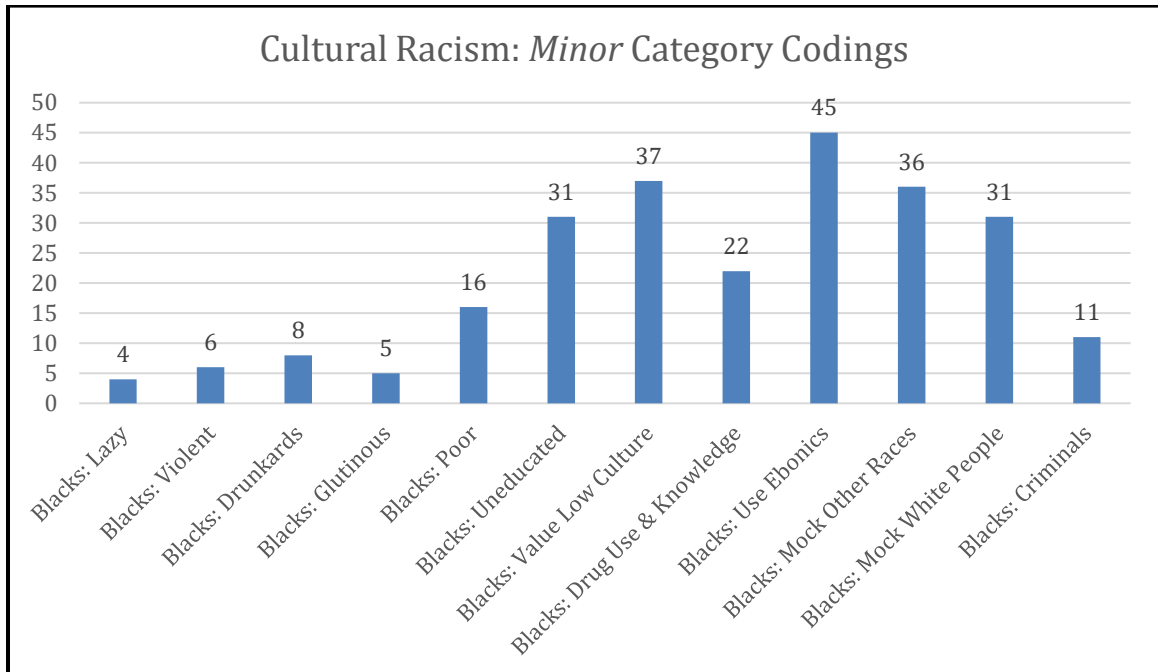
The Vices

The first set of cultural racial stereotypes are what I have called The Vices. These vices are typically understood to be personal characteristics, but since Imgurians assume that African Americans primarily write these memetic images, and since many of the images are of African Americans, the tone of the images shifts from a personal vice to a community practice. Below are several images from each minor theme of The Vices:

Figure 9. Lazy

Figure 10. Violent

Figure 11. Drunkards

Figure 12. Lazy

Would you smack your ex for
$1,000,000?

Vould you smack your ex fo
$1,000,000?

93 likes

IS THIS EVEN A SERIOUS
QUESTION? I WOULDA BATISTA BOMB
THAT BITCH THROUGH TWO TABLES FOR
99¢ TO BUY A MCCHICKEN. MY MOM
COULD EVEN CATCH THE 619, WORD TO
REY MYSTERIO. FOR $1,000,000? I'LL
GRAB MY GRANDMAS ASHES AND
THROW EM IN THE AIR LIKE LEBRONS
PRE-GAME RITUAL, NIGGA MONEY
TALKS.

Smh no money is worth hitting
a girl

Like   Comment   ...

White people Vs Black people

Figure 13. Violent

When you been eating all day
trying to cure your hangover but
now you just hungover and fat
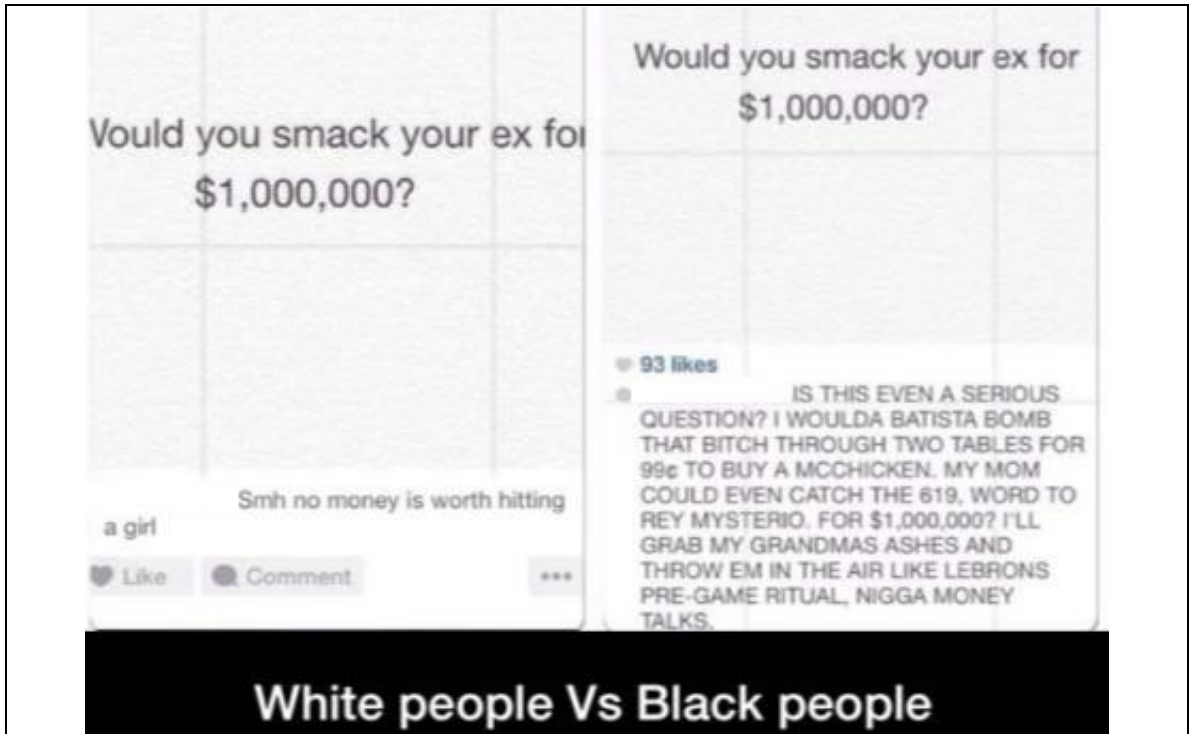
Figure 14. Drunkards

Figure 15. Glutinous

Figure 16. Poor

when you tryna eat your roommate's food without them noticing.

Figure 17. Glutinous

Ladies: What's the most romantic thing a man has done for you?

26/16, 10:43 AM

Rented the same car I got and switched the tires so I had a brand new set

Figure 18. Poor

What reinforces the stereotypes of these images even further is the combination of multiple stereotypes in one image, powerfully combining common stigmas in a seemingly natural, and therefore "common sense," way. This can be seen in Figure 15 above, which combines not only the vice of gluttony, but also invokes the common tropes of the black church and the use of Ebonics, as seen in phrases "look like this," "gone be good," and the abbreviation "af," which means "as fuck." This can also be seen in Figure 18 above, which recounts the actions of a woman's man who purchased a rental car only to steal its wheels and replace them with older ones. This Black Twitter image indicates not only poverty, but also criminality, another common black stereotype which I will examine on its own later. In both Figures 15 and 18, then, there is a confluence of degrading, dehumanizing stereotypes that lends credence to the reification of racial ingroup and outgroup markers. No longer solitary acts of individuals, these images have been put into albums on Imgur and are seen to represent black ways of life in America.

Streetwise

The second grouping under the major category of Cultural Racism includes the minor categories of Blacks Uneducated, Blacks Value Low Culture, Drug Use & Knowledge, Ebonics, Mocking Other Races, and Mocking White People. These categories all consist of common assumptions of how African Americans spend their time; in other words, what constitutes the daily life of a black person. The first and simplest assumption of this theme is that African Americans all speak in Ebonics, or African American Vernacular English (Ronkin and Karn 1999). Ebonics holds a

prominent place in Black Twitter posts. Additionally, in this theme I find the common

assumption that black kids not only dislike school and education, but are also not as smart

as others. Another assumption that finds expression here is the place of drugs in the lives

of African Americans; many Black Twitter images contain references to drugs and drug

culture. Finally, a common topic in Black Twitter images is the theme of making fun of

people of other races, specifically white people. These are all seen in the examples below.

Figure 19. Uneducated

Figure 20. Ebonics

Figure 21. Drug Use & Knowledge

Figure 22. Uneducated

Figure 23. Ebonics

Figure 24. Drug Use & Knowledge

These images purportedly give voice to the daily lives of typical African Americans. They are presumed to be from the perspective of African Americans who live a "normal" life in the United States; these images are taken as normative for black existence in America. While Ebonics is found in many Black Twitter images, the two particular phrases in Figures 20 and 23 above include "Finna", which means "going to" and "smh" which means "shake/shaking my head."

By far, most Black Twitter images in which other people's races are mocked concern stereotypes about white people. But, there are occasionally some about members of other races, as shown below. This gives the impression that African Americans are extremely conscious of race in America and habitually mock other races.

When your parents want you to be a doctor but you know in your heart that ball is life
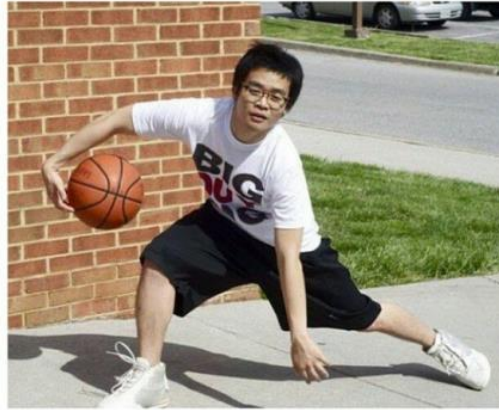
Figure 25. Mocking Other Races

WHEN YA BOYS CALL U N SAY THAT YA 7TH WIFE SHOWING TOO MUCH ANKLE

Figure 26. Mocking Other Races

There is another consequence of the presence of racially-charged jokes in Black

Twitter images: many Imgurians express anger and frustration at being the target of such

a joke. They express this anger through the comments they write, voicing what I initially

coded "Imgurians Voicing Reverse Racism." This coding grew into the themes of how

hegemonic whiteness is constructed, which I will examine later, when I discuss in depth

my findings from the comments of Imgur. I have listed two examples of such comments

here, next to the images that bring out Imgurians' ire. Below are several Black Twitter

images that I coded "Mocking White People":

Figure 27. Mocking White People

In response to Figure 27, one Imgurian writes:

Figure 28. Imgurian Opposed to "Mocking White People"

This Imgurian in Figure 28 is expressing his direct opposition to the sentiment

expressed in Figure 27. It is worth noticing that while this user did not receive many

upvotes for this comment, he did receive a total of 2, meaning that, in sum, there was one

more person who agreed with him than disagreed. I also coded this particular response as

"Imgurians Opposed to Ebonics," because the user's response bears a striking similarity

to the anti-Ebonics work researched by Ronkin and Karn (1999), which also will be

analyzed later on. The second example of images that mock white people is below.

yall so harsh on white ppl telling them
they dont face oppression. have u
seen what their moms make for
dinner?? thats unseasoned
oppression

1:46 am · 10 Jun 15

Figure 29. Mocking White People

An Imgurian responded to Figure 29 with the following:

A   190 pts   Jul 31   •••
I never got the unseasoned food shit I mean Italians are white and what about new Orleans like
fuck man half there food is seasoning.

Figure 30. Imgurian Opposed to "Mocking White People"

This Imgurian is opposing the opinion expressed in Figure 29. Not only is this

comment noteworthy for its lack of historical understanding about the shifting definition

of whiteness concerning Italians, but it received a shocking 190 cumulative upvotes. This

means that almost 200 people agreed with this Imgurian to the extent that they would

upvote his comment. Comments with upvotes over 25 regularly reach the top of the posts

on which they are written, which exposes them to the largest number of readers. Here, an

Imgurian expressing his distaste for a particular stereotype about what it means to be

white in America, and hundreds of others agree with him in his displeasure.

Finally, to conclude the thematic grouping *Street-Smart*, much of Black Twitter

uses images from cartoons, creatively transforming them into a multitude of meanings.

This leaves the Imgurian with the sense that African Americans all watch, know, and

enjoy TV shows that are meant for children. While many TV series have received critical

acclaim in recent years (such as Game of Thrones, Stranger Things, etc.) these are not the

series or characters that are regularly seen in Black Twitter images. Instead, children's

cartoons such as Spongebob and Dragonball Z dominate, as seen below.

Figure 31. Blacks Value Low Culture

Figure 32. Blacks Value Low Culture

While other themes can be coded alone on an image, the theme Blacks Value Low Culture is almost always paired with another theme. This is because it is actually an analytic category based on a specific criterion (Is the Black Twitter image from a cartoon?) rather than a category based on the content *expressed by* the cartoon. That is, I coded all images that contain cartoons as "Blacks Value Low Culture," regardless of what other content is present. In Figures 31 and 32 above, this is readily seen.

Figure 31 describes a scene in which friends are using drugs (therefore it has also been coded with "Drug Use & Knowledge") and Figure 32 describes a strained relationship between a black youth and his mom, contributing to the stereotype that not only do black mothers "hit" their children, but that black children act in a manner that warrants such aggressive behavior (thus it has also been coded with "Blacks as Violent").

Referencing these cartoons, Imgurians regularly ask, "Why are black people so obsessed with Dragonball Z?" While others sometimes defend the show as worthy of admiration, nevertheless in asking the question there is a categorization of black people

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as distinct, "other", or different from white people in their tastes and proclivities. The

boundary that separates or creates this distinction is understood to be racial in origin.

Blacks as Criminals

       The final minor category with the major category of Cultural Racism is Blacks as

Criminals. Many Black Twitter images contribute to the idea that black people engage in

a host of criminal behaviors, as seen below:

Figure 33. Criminals

Figure 34. Criminals

       The first, Figure 33, is bound up with several other negative stereotypes about

black men, namely that they are hypersexual and hyperviolent. The second, Figure 34, is

more straightforward. It is a tweet from an African American man that simply wishes he was back in jail because he is bored, reinforcing the notion that blacks belong in and are accustomed to jails because of their criminal proclivities.

I turn now from the major category of Cultural Racism to a more specific population: black *men* in particular. While over three quarters of Black Twitter images are tagged with a Cultural Racism minor category, nearly half are tagged with a Black Men minor category. Specifically, the minor category *Black Men as Sexual Predators* was tagged in 72 out of 306 images analyzed, as seen below.

Black Men: Violent, Hypersexual, Disinterested, Absent

By far, the images of Black Twitter further the narrative that the media began about black men (Anderson 2012): they are violently aggressive, sexual predators who do not care for their partners romantically and who will leave any children behind in the wake of their path. In his research, Hughey (2011) found the somewhat counterintuitive theme of black men as emasculated, as well as hyperviolent and hypersexual; the white men with whom he spoke often mentioned the debilitating effect that slavery and oppression have had on black men specifically. They also rooted this idea that black men have been emasculated in their domineering black women. However, I found that the stereotype of the emasculated black man was all but nonexistent in Black Twitter. Instead, black men as sexual beasts dominate these images, as seen below.

Table 2. Black Men Minor Category Allotments
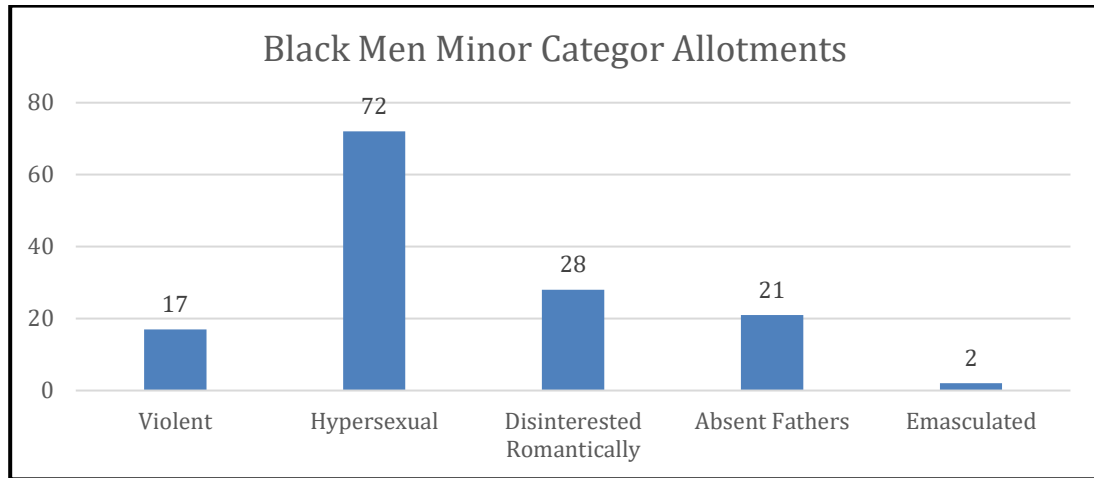
The following are examples of typical Black Twitter images pertaining to black men.

Figure 35. Black Men Sexual Predators

Figure 36. Black Men Disinterested Romantically

Figure 37. Black Men Sexual Predators

Figure 38. Black Men Disinterested Romantically
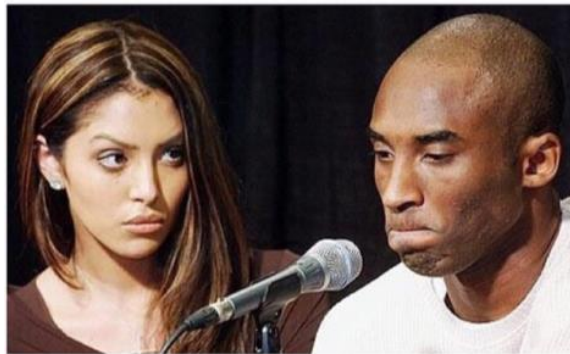
Figure 39. Black Men Disinterested Romantically

Figure 40. Absent Father

Figure 41. Absent Father

Figure 42. Black Men Violent Predators

The themes that concern black men often overlap, as seen in several of the images above. While I have labeled each image with only one minor category, several should be coded with at least one other category. This includes Figure 35, which is also coded "Black Absent Father" since this man has abandoned his son in order to follow a woman; Figure 37, also coded "Black Men Disinterested Romantically" because it depicts black men as seeking other partners without remorse, only fearing the possibility of being caught; and Figure 41, coded both with "Black Men Violent Predators" since the scene depicts a man strongly punching another character's stomach, and "Blacks Value Low Culture" because of the cartoon used. Turning from black men, I look now to black women specifically. What do Black Twitter images communicate about them?

Black Women: Domineering, Promiscuous, Avaricious

Black women, similarly, find the stereotypes begun by the media following them into digital spaces (Anderson 2012; Hughey 2011). The black woman is depicted as promiscuous and sexually alluring, causing those around her to chase her with an irresistible lust. She dominates, filling the role of the "angry black woman" as she yells, seemingly unable to speak at a volume lower than that of escalated rage. Finally, she is avaricious, greedily seeking men who will satiate her unquenchable desire for material goods and prosperity. The stereotype of the black "Mammy," who cleans, cooks, and cares for children, is oddly absent from Black Twitter images despite its role in history (Hall 1981). Table 3 below shows the allotments of these three minor categories, and examples of them follow.

Table 3. Black Women Minor Categories
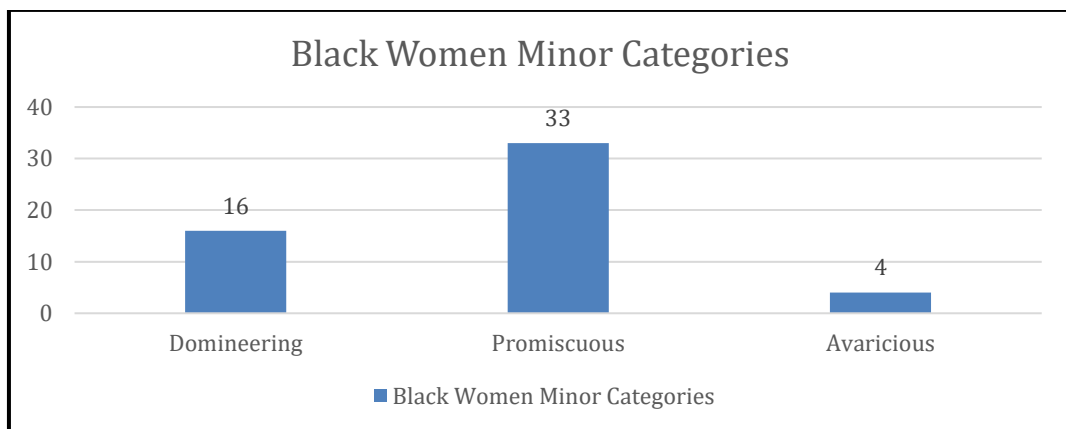
Similar in frequency to the category of Black Men as Sexual Predators, Black Women as Promiscuous is the most common of the three Black Women minor categories by far, with over half of black women images coded with Black women as Promiscuous.

Figure 43. Black Women Dominant

Figure 44. Black Women Promiscuous

Figure 45. Black Women Dominant

Figure 46. Black Women Promiscuous

Figure 47. Black Women Avaricious

Figure 48. Black Women Avaricious

As with previous images, I have coded several of these with multiple minor categories: Figure 45 juxtaposes white and black relationships and makes concrete a difference between them, therefore I also coded it with the Cultural Racism minor category of Mocking White People. Figure 47 I have coded with all three Black Women minor categories: dominant, promiscuous, and avaricious, because of the forward, sexualized nature of her advance and the caption that is written above the image, linking her behavior to the wealth and prestige of being with a famous athlete like Stephen Curry.

I contend that all of the images thus far, those of the major categories of Cultural Racism, Black Men, and Black Women reproduce the stereotypes and assumptions of the iconic ghetto. However, there is one specific type of Black Twitter image that reifies these stereotypes in a particularly efficacious way: the format called "White Twitter vs. Black Twitter."

Reifying Race: "White Twitter vs. Black Twitter"

"White Twitter vs. Black Twitter" is a specific internet meme with a particular organization or format for its content. In this case, the format is pairing two identical images together and labeling the left side as "White Twitter" and the right side as "Black Twitter." The two images have different captions; the left is supposedly written by a white person, and the right is supposedly written by a black person. This format uniquely reifies racial stereotypes because it brings those stereotypes to the forefront of the viewer's gaze, since racial differences are the main feature of the format. Often, there is an additional caption that explicitly notifies the viewer what they are seeing: "White vs

Black Twitter." This is seen in Figures 51 and 52. Therefore, through the different captions written by "white" users and "black" users this format communicates what it means to be white in America as opposed to, distinguished from, what it means to be black in America. The assumption that undergirds these images is that white and black people view the world differently, approaching it with different values and opinions about normative behaviors.

Figure 49. White Twitter vs. Black Twitter

Figure 50. White Twitter vs. Black Twitter

Figure 51. White Twitter vs. Black Twitter

Figure 52. White Twitter vs. Black Twitter

Figure 53. White Twitter vs. Black Twitter

Figure 54. White Twitter vs. Black Twitter

From these six "White Twitter vs. Black Twitter" images, the content of the images varies widely and can encompasses any of the minor categories previously discussed. For example, Figure 49 focuses on black men's hypersexuality and sexual prowess; Figure 50 echoes other Black Twitter posts that mock white children's disrespect toward their parents; Figure 51 focuses on black men's sexual infidelity; Figure 52 portrays black men as violent and willing to do anything for a large enough sum of money; Figure 53 points to the stereotype of absent fathers in the black community; and Figure 54 gives the impression that black people are not as smart as white people, that they are uneducated. This format juxtaposes supposedly natural white and black sentiments and responses to everyday life in America. I contend that this format exceptionally reifies racial stereotypes. I now turn to Black Twitter images and

examine them in light of Stuart Hall's (1981) three types: The Comedian, Slave, and Native.

Hall's Types: The Native, Slave and Comedian

In one sense, most of Black Twitter aligns with Hall's description of the Comedian, also called the clown or entertainer. This is because all of Black Twitter on Imgur is understood as comedic, as entertainment for a majority-white audience. The common sentiment expressed by individuals on Imgur is that black people are simply "better" at Twitter than others. That is, black people are inherently funnier and make better jokes. This is the stereotype of the Comedian.

While this appears to be a compliment, in actuality it reinforces this Comedian stereotype that Hall identified in popular culture (1981). This is the belief that black people possess an innate humor, superior to whites'. This foolishness, this clowning and comedic attitude, is a source of humor as well as derision that the majority laughs with and laughs at. Black people, as comedians, become clowns and fools.

However, I have not coded all Black Twitter images as "Type: Black Comedian." Only those images wherein the goal is clearly to make a joke, rather than share an aspect of daily life or commentary on a social issue, have been coded as the Comedian. Below are examples of such images:

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When u just had some of the dankest
tiddy milk in ur brief existence 🔥🔥🔥

Figure 55. Black Comedian

martin luther king aint die for this
smh this worse than slavery

Figure 56. Black Comedian

In both images, the speakers use Ebonics (seen in the words and phrases

"dankest," "tiddy," "smh," "this worse than") and provide a comedic caption to the

images. Figure 55 is a fictional account of how the baby feels; while undoubtedly true

that infants react positively to being fed, it is common sense that none would be able to articulate their pleasure as the caption indicates. This image, and the caption that accompany it, are to be understood as a joke.

Figure 56 can be analyzed in much the same way. The image pictures a white man crossing over a black man in a pick-up basketball game. The speaker, who captioned the image, speaks from a vantage point that shows he is unrelated to the persons in the image. He is not describing how either person in the image feels, nor is he providing a fictional situation and using the image as a "reaction" meme (if so, the caption would begin with "when I" or "when you," etc."). Instead, he is providing comedic commentary on the situation as an outside observer, noting that Martin Luther King, Jr. did not die only to have a black man beaten by a white man in basketball, and that being beaten by a white person in basketball is worse than slavery. I therefore coded this image as "Type: Black Comedian" for its hyperbole and comedic focus.

Hall (1981) describes two other types in addition to the Comedian: The Native and the Slave. There were no rich instances of "Native" (only 3 images could have been coded as such) so I did not include it in my analysis. But, there were a few more coded as "Slave," with examples below. The Slave, as discussed earlier, is dependable and sweet-natured; this is the stereotype of the "Mammy" and the steadfast fieldworker who has a sincere devotion to his master. Yet, there is the potential for the "slave" figure to betray his master. Thus, there is distrust towards the slave, an insecurity about whether his devotion is truly sincere or merely a farce. Will the slave turn on his master, either in

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violent force or through abandonment? The images below evidence this trait: loyal yet

treacherous, devoted yet conniving.

Figure 57. Slave

Figure 58. Slave

Both images have as the focused content an untrustworthy friend. The first, Figure 57, is a tweet of a black man "calling out" others on their supposed generosity and good-natured friendships. In reality, this speaker says, this is false because they will not even lend their friends $5. There is the outward appearance of loyalty, but the inner reality of betrayal. Likewise, in Figure 58, two black women (not insignificantly referred to only as "hoes") are supposedly fighting over a man, yet they do not know that their mutual friend is also sleeping with him. This is the trope of the seemingly devoted friend who in actuality is quick to backstab or betray those who trust her. This is reminiscent of the stereotype of Hall's Slave, the noticeable difference being there is no "master" and "slave," but instead someone who is tricking and betraying their friends, which is arguably a worse stereotype.

While the previously White Twitter vs. Black Twitter is an efficacious format, there is a type of image in Black Twitter that only weakly, or not all, extends the racial stereotypes previously examined. This type of image seems out of place with everything discussed so far. I call this theme the Political Turned Entertainment. While the other images are viewed for entertainment and comedic relief, these images more clearly attempt to make others aware of injustices against African Americans. To this final category of images do I turn before concluding with an analysis of the co-occurrences of various categories in Black Twitter images.

Black Twitter from Twitter.com: The Political Turned Entertainment

While they follow the same patterns as others that I have observed, these images have much different content. Instead of showing degrading stereotypes about black life in America, Political Turned Entertainment images give voice to the struggles that African Americans face, including political injustices and economic & social hardships. Because other images seem to laugh *at* African Americans in their daily plight, these images seem out of place since they give a stronger, more empathetic voice to the dark realities that many black people face every day. The other images of Black Twitter seem to mock African Americans; these images invite the individual to understand something deeper about their everyday life experiences:

Figure 59. Political Turned Entertainment

Figure 60. Political Turned Entertainment

Figure 61. Political Turned Entertainment

Odd day to have a "2nd place in the civil war" rally

Figure 62. Political Turned Entertainment

These images are few and far between in Black Twitter on Imgur; they are not very prevalent. I surmise that this is because their content is not perceived as entertainment, the main reason that other images have made it into Black Twitter albums that are uploaded to Imgur. So, those who collect Black Twitter images routinely pass over images that express these sentiments. But, every now and then, one of these politically-charged images makes its way onto Imgur.

These images reflect Black Twitter as it exists on *Twitter*. These are the images that the Black Twitter community shares, seeking to build community, camaraderie, and a network of support as they speak out about the injustices they face in America. This content mirrors other studies already discussed (Clark 2014). This content acts as a running commentary and expression of a genuinely African American viewpoint trying to come to grips with and reform the injustice perpetrated against them, including mass incarceration and police brutality.

This is seen in the images above: Figures 59 and 61 center on police brutality and the relationship between the white majority, police officers, and African Americans. Figure 60 is a commentary on the media and the disparate ways they portray white and black killers, condemning black killers regardless of who they are and acquitting white killers in spite of who they are.

This concludes an examination of the categories I used in coding the Black Twitter images of my research. But as I conclude this discussion, more needs to be said about the co-occurrence of codes on specific images.

Co-occurrence and Black Twitter on Imgur

I rarely coded images with only one category, and by charting co-occurrences stable patterns can be identified in Black Twitter images. These relational patterns indicate which content is correlated and can give clues as to what kinds of images are particularly efficacious in proliferating common iconic ghetto stereotypes about black Americans. By examining the co-occurrences of specific codes, I can learn what kinds of stereotypes are linked with others, capturing their overlapping nature (Hughey 2011). Appendix A contains Table 10, which outlines the already examined major and minor categories of my categorization, along with the total number of images possessing each theme, the total codes assigned, and the co-occurrences of all of these codes. A graphical depiction of the high frequency co-occurrences (a co-occurrence greater than 20%) follows, with the one direction and bi-directional relationships differentiated by color and arrowhead direction.
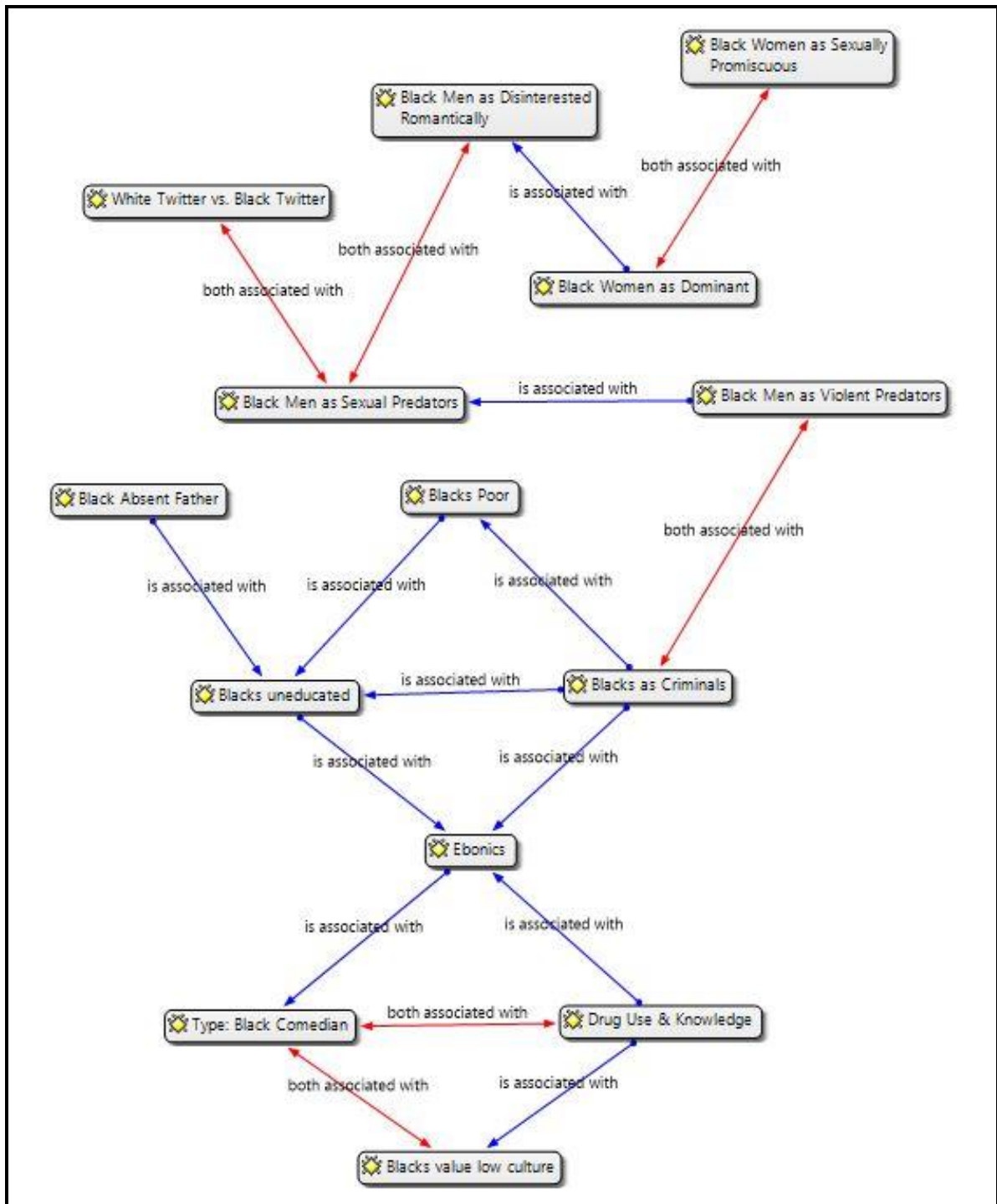
Figure 63. High Frequency Co-occurrences

From Figure 63, I see the interrelations and connections between various codings. For example, Blacks as Criminals and Drug Use & Knowledge prove to be of central position, since they are associated with *four* other codes and *three* other codes, respectively. The four associations of Blacks as Criminals are Black Men as Violent Predators, Blacks Poor, Ebonics, and Blacks Uneducated. The three associations of Drug Use & Knowledge are Ebonics, Blacks Value Low Culture, and Type: Black Comedian.

Interestingly, there is a diamond of relations that has formed in the bottom of Figure 63, reproduced below in Figure 64. Drug Use & Knowledge and Type: Black Comedian are both associated with each other, meaning that a high frequency of either code co-occurs with the other. The same is true of Type: Black Comedian and Blacks Value Low Culture. Finally, as previously mentioned, Drug Use and Knowledge is also associated with Blacks Value Low Culture and Ebonics, while Ebonics is in turn associated with Type: Black Comedian.
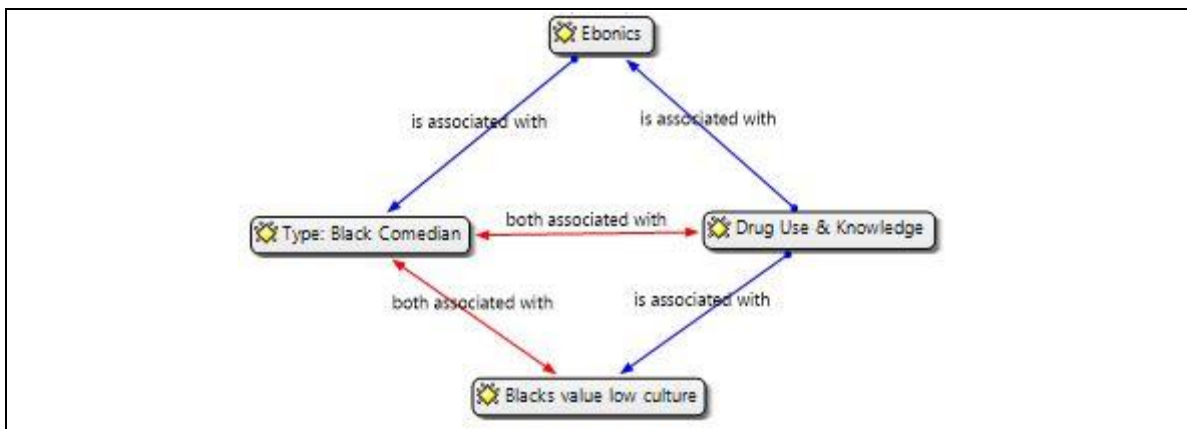
Figure 64. Black Comedian, Drugs & Ebonics

This coalesces to indicate that when images are coded with Drug Use & Knowledge the content is very likely a joke expressed using Ebonics and low-culture content. Thus, when white Imgurians view Black Twitter, they regularly see low-culture images that fill a comedic role while using Ebonics and talking about drugs.

A similarly complex relationship occurs when looking at black men's sexuality. This code bidirectionally co-occurs with both Black Men as Disinterested Romantically and White Twitter vs. Black Twitter. Additionally, Black Men as Violent Predators is associated with Black Men as Sexual Predators. This means that Black Twitter images of black men tie aggressive violence to hypersexuality, and these hypersexual black men are likely to be depicted as uninterested romantically in their partners, as seen in Figure 65.

Much of the content organized by the White Twitter vs. Black Twitter format depicts Black Men as Sexual Predators, as seen in the bidirectional association of the two. In fact, out of 43 images coded with White Twitter vs. Black Twitter 20 of them were also coded with Black Men as Sexual Predators, a startlingly high ratio.
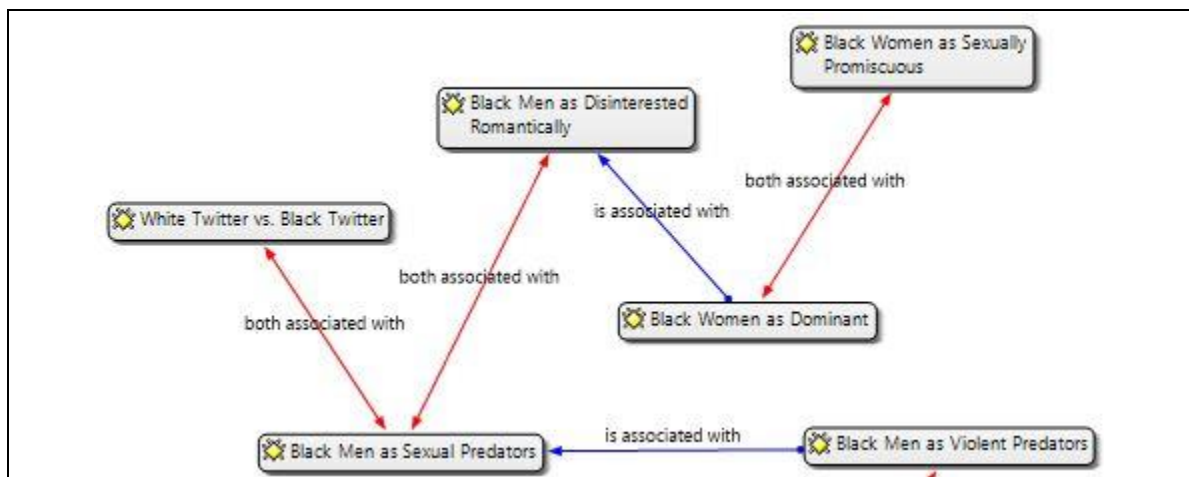
Figure 65. Stereotypes of Black Men

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Finally, as seen in the top-right quadrant of Figure 65, the bidirectional relationship between Black Women as Domineering and Black Women as Promiscuous indicates that these characteristics are becoming fused together in the black female body. The visual representations of black women on Imgur are likely to portray them as both dominant and sexually licentious. Black Women as Dominant, in turn, is also associated with Black Men as Disinterested Romantically; the dominant attitude and personality of black women, in the images of Black Twitter, co-occurs with black men growing increasingly uninterested in romantically and emotionally connecting with black women.

The Images of Stereotype and Race: Conclusion

The stereotypes of the iconic ghetto have found expression in Black Twitter images on Imgur. They range from broad stereotypes concerning the black community in general to more specific stereotypes about black men and black women in particular. By far, most Black Twitter images contain what I call general Cultural Racism about the black community at large; I coded 251 out of 306 images with a Cultural Racism minor theme. Beyond this, images referencing black men (140 out of 306 images) and black women (53 out of 306 images) are overwhelming focused on black men as hypersexual brutes (72 out of 140 images) and black women as tantalizing seductresses (33 out of 53 images). The sexualized black body, both male and female, is a constant in Black Twitter on Imgur.

I turn from the visual data of this thesis, the images that convey racial stereotypes, to the comments written by the users themselves. What do Imgurians think about Black

Twitter? Are they for or against it? More particularly, is there any evidence that this digital community constitutes a color-blind space? Perhaps, instead, old fashioned racism has taken root here, transforming Imgur into an anti-black or alt-right space.

From analyzing the comments, finding the richest of data possible, I conclude that Imgur is indeed a color-blind community: they solidify the iconic ghetto stereotypes already examined by directly naming and reinforcing many of them; they use Ebonics, though they normally do not do so outside of Imgur; they abhor overt racism while praising jokes that have racial overtones; they sexually approach any woman on Imgur and fetishize interracial relationships; some feel oppressed and frustrated when their own race is mocked & when they feel victimized, yet others express sorrow over racial injustice. Imgur is a color-blind community, but one that is caught in a racial bind.

CHAPTER VI

WHITE MASCULINITIES IN A COLOR-BLIND SPACE

Online Discourse in a Color-Blind Space

Whereas observing the images of Black Twitter enables categorization and

discussion about emergent themes in those visual objects, by observing and analyzing

comments that users write I can come to a rich understanding of the ways in which

Imgurian discourse is shaped by Black Twitter images. Furthermore, as has previously

been discussed, those comments that have received many votes (either positive or

negative) and also have many "replies" prove to hold the richest potential for

understanding Imgurians' viewpoints. These comments contain back and forth dialogue,

each reply of which is voted upon, giving insight into how each turn in the conversation

is received by the community at large.

Many of the same categories and themes from my analysis of Black Twitter

images appear in the comments as well. Users express their distaste for the black

community, assumed to be a monolithic entity with one cultural outlook. They decry and

mock the use of drugs, absent fathers, promiscuous and risky behavior, and illegal

activities. Like the Black Twitter image categories, I have coded these under the broad

category of Cultural Racism. But in the comments, I find far more than mere discussion

of common cultural myths about what it means to be black in America; instead, I

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find out what it means to be white as well. I find many Imgurians expressing ire over perceived injustice against themselves; I find them mocking the use of Ebonics, holding their own educational attainments above others'; I see some resist racist tendencies and attempt to give voice to what they see as genuine injustices against black people; I see memesis in action, the repetition of common phrases that carry with them a kind of digital social capital so that the use of such phrases is rewarded with upvotes; and I see outright, hostile racism. Imgur is a color-blind space: coded racetalk is acceptable, especially in the context of humor, while overt racism is decried.

Two preliminary issues must be discussed before turning to the meat of Imgurians' racial comments on Imgur. These are the issues of memesis and the assumption, by Imgurians, that Black Twitter evidences black norms. The first issue is paramount in understanding the common, repetitive phrases that Imgurians employ to garner upvotes, the currency of status and acceptance on Imgur. The second issue undergirds the point that Imgurians' comments evidence the belief that Black Twitter images are true and accurate of black Americans, rather than fictitious. While the images may be jokes, the comments on Imgur paint the picture of a monolithic black culture that exists in the United States today.

Memesis on Imgur: Gaining the Coveted Upvote

As previously discussed, the upvote is the coveted status symbol on Imgur, enabling users to reach higher reputation tiers and be given "medallions" to mark their progress. The upvote is the only seemingly objective means granted that allows

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Imgurians to distinguish themselves from others, and it is the primary way in which comments and posts are valued and sorted on Imgur, with the best posts being sent to the Front Page and the best comments being sent to the top of the page on the posts in which they are written. In an anonymous space such as Imgur, where users are only identified by pseudonymous usernames and sparsely detailed profile pages, how do Imgurians gain upvotes? How do they set themselves apart from others, finding existentially fulfilling interactions with others and legitimation for their own existence (Bourdieu 2000; Julien 2015)?

Imgurians employ memetic phrases that are known and understood by other users who have developed the necessary eye, the digital habitus necessary to perceive what may remain hidden to others (Julien 2015). Such "social steganography" is the coding of hidden meanings behind commonplace or typical words and phrases (boyd and Marwick 2011). Memetic phrases allow the anonymous individuals on Imgur to create in-groups and out-groups, those who participate in the accepted and *expected* idiomatic phrases, and those who do not. Those who use these memetic phrases are granted upvotes, the token of acceptance on Imgur.

Researchers have found that in anonymous spaces, when the social identity of the group is salient, the influence of group norms and the desire for individuals to be able to be identified as part of the group increase. They therefore take on the group's identity and norms (Mazambani et al. 2015). While there is no single, group identity on Imgur, particularly pertaining to issues of race, by writing memetic phrases many users learn to sidestep controversial topics and instead garner upvotes. In other words, even in the midst

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of controversy, Imgurians have learned how to continue gathering upvotes and increase their own sense of belonging, as they identify with the community and downplay the ways in which they may disagree with other facets of the group's identity.

Because I am analyzing Black Twitter on Imgur, most of the memetic phrases used on these posts are specialized and differ from memetic phrases used by Imgurians on other kinds of posts. The most commonly employed memesis on Black Twitter posts is writing in Ebonics, as many of the Black Twitter posts themselves contain Ebonics. Imgurians admit that they do not use this language in everyday life; it is only on Imgur that they utilize Ebonics as memetic phrases to garner upvotes, achieving community acceptance and high-ranking status.

However, some memetic phrases used are consistent with the broader Imgur community as a whole. What follows are a few examples of Imgurians using Ebonics as memetic phrases and other memetic phrases found on Imgur.

Memetic Ebonics and General Memesis

I will examine the use of Ebonics and the role of anti-Ebonics comments on Imgur later on in my analysis. Below are a few brief examples of the ways that Imgurians use Ebonics as *memetic* phrases on Imgur. Notice the repetition, simplicity, and upvotes granted for writing these phrases.
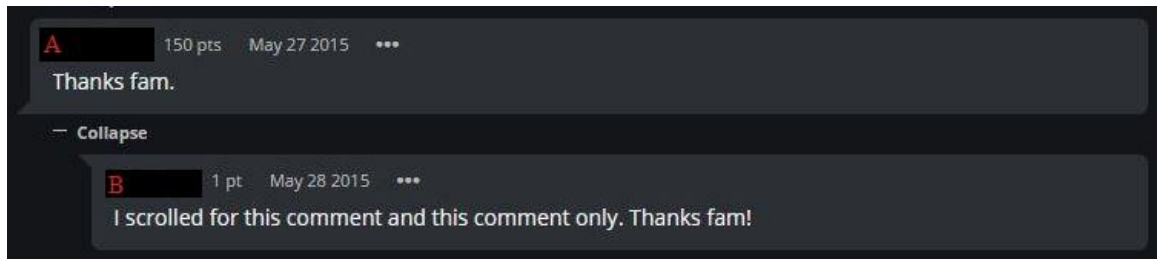
Figure 66. Memetic Ebonics

Figure 66 provides an illustration of Ebonics as an expected behavior from Imgurians on Black Twitter albums. "Thanks fam" is a memetic phrase, a recurring and expected response to Black Twitter albums. This is confirmed by user B who says that he was looking for "this comment and this comment only." This is evidence that Imgurians know specific memetic phrases and expect to find them when they encounter Black Twitter posts. Here, user B expects someone to write, "Thanks fam."

User A has been rewarded through upvotes for his utilization of memetic Ebonics. His comment is simple; he is thanking the person who posted the Black Twitter album, and he does so by using the Ebonics phrase, "Thanks fam." His comment nets him 150 points, indicating extensive acceptance by the Imgur community for his simple, memetic, Ebonics phrase.

In Figure 67 below is a common occurrence for comments sections on Black Twitter albums. It begins with one user employing a memetic phrase that does *not* bear Ebonics markers, "Tell my family I love them, i'm going in." This is commonly written on Black Twitter albums because they are known for their extensive length, sometimes taking hours to see the hundreds or thousands of images. This memetic phrase is also found on other Imgur posts that are exceedingly long. This phrase, then, is an example of

a memetic phrase on Imgur, one that is known and expected, yet which is not written in Ebonics.
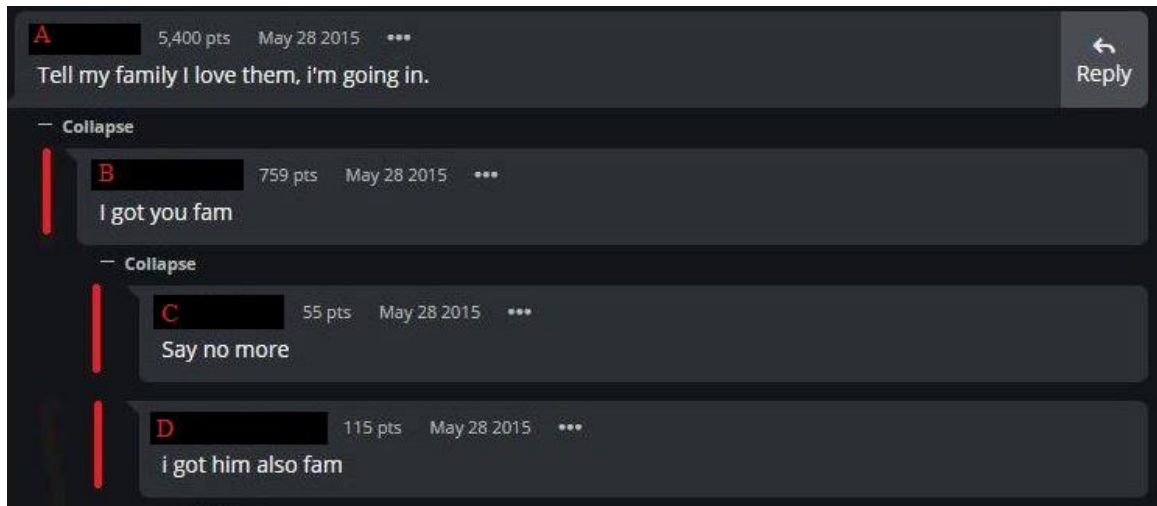
Figure 67. General Memesis and Memetic Ebonics

In response to this first comment, users employ Ebonics to show their acceptance and agreement, garnering substantial amounts of upvotes as they do so. The first Imgurian receives 5400 upvotes, an astonishing amount, for writing a memetic phrase that is well known and accepted by the entirety of the Imgur community. The comments that follow receive 759, 55, and 115 points. From these point values, all these comments are moderately to extensively accepted by the Imgur community. In their comments, they employ simple Ebonics phrases: "I got you fam," "Say no more," and "i got him also fam." Note, therefore, that they write Ebonics memetic phrases underneath a comment that contained a memetic phrase that was *not* written in Ebonics.

Below is Figure 68, one part of a particularly rich dialogue for its extensive number of replies and illuminating subject matter. While I will return to it later for its

fetishization of interracial sex, focused male gaze and use of Ebonics, here I have
highlighted the general memetic phrases written by three Imgurians.

Figure 68. General Memesis

The first commenter self-identifies as a "small white girl," and other Imgurians
proceed to make sexual advances toward her. This is most clearly seen in user C's
comment, in which he writes, "So let me put some black on your inside small white girl."
Directly beneath this comment, user D writes the memetic Ebonics phrase, "My nigga."
Imgurian E with, "thatsmyfetish.zip." This is a general memetic phrase that is seen on

Imgur and accepted by the community. The concluding ".zip" is in reference to Zip files, which are archive files containing other compressed files that must be "unzipped" to be opened and used. Thus, F writes, "Shouldn't that have been .unzip?", another memetic phrase and a typical response to the user who writes "thatsmyfetish.zip."

The concluding ".Unzip" references both what is typical behavior for zip files (you unzip them) and masturbation: the unzipping, in the latter case, refers to the individual unzipping his pants to masturbate, since he has identified something that is sexually enticing for him. The final response is another memetic phrase; .rar is another type of compression file that must be unzipped or opened, and is also understood to be an innuendo for sex.

Imgurians routinely write memetic phrases in order to attain upvotes and be accepted by the community. Often, when Imgurians are downvoted unexpectedly, they express sadness or frustration over being downvoted. Sometimes they reply, saying, "I don't know what I did to deserve downvotes," or "I'm not sure whose downvoting me." Imgurians communicate the investments in their comments and desire to be upvoted. Conversely, when an Imgurian knows that what they are writing might be controversial, they will sometimes write, "Downvote if you must, but…" This indicates their awareness that controversial or provocative statements will not help them get upvotes, yet occasionally they decide that they want to make their true opinion known more than they wish to write memetic phrases and receive upvotes.

Not everyone who writes a memetic phrase expects to receive the *same* amount of upvotes; in fact, it is common knowledge that the first person to write a memetic phrase

generally receives the most upvotes. Because of this, users will often write comments expressing jealousy when they encounter a memetic phrase that they wanted to write first: they respond to these comments with, "Damn, beat me to it!" or "Ah you read my mind."

All of this provides evidence that Imgurians write comments expecting the community to weigh in on their opinions. Many stay safe within the confines of expected, rote memetic phrases that garner hundreds, if not thousands, of upvotes. Many express genuine opinions, knowing that doing so may cost them points if their comment is downvoted to a negative score. But all look to the community to upvote, downvote, and reply to their comments. Imgur is an active community, with hundreds of comments on many Black Twitter posts.

With a basic understanding of memetic phrases and the ways that Imgurians communicate on Black Twitter posts, I now turn to the second preliminary concern: the expression among Imgurians that Black Twitter shows norms of the black community.

Black Twitter Shows Black Norms

Because the images have been decontextualized, taken from other digital avenues and pathways on other social media sites, it is paramount to see that their presumed original context fades away as they are brought into Imgur, a predominantly white space (Anderson 2015). Whatever the images may have meant or communicated on another website, such as Twitter or Tumblr, is not considered by Imgurians when they view Black Twitter. What takes center stage is the communication of the images and what Imgurians

express about them *on Imgur*; therefore, I must ask how they interpret Black Twitter images.

A recurring type of comment on Black Twitter shows that Imgurians seem to think Black Twitter is exemplary of black norms. Their comments regard these images as true representations of what life is like for the majority of African Americans. The black community is portrayed as one monolithic community with one socio-economic status, that of the iconic ghetto, while disregarding evidence of the rising black middle class (Wacquant 2002; Anderson 2015). Many Black Twitter images may have originally been intended to communicate an entirely different message; this is moot once the images have transmediated to Imgur, once they have moved from one social media hub to another.

Here are a few examples of Imgurians writing that Black Twitter shows black norms:

A   1,446 pts   Nov 17   •••
Before Black Twitter I honestly had no idea black people were so into Dragon Ball
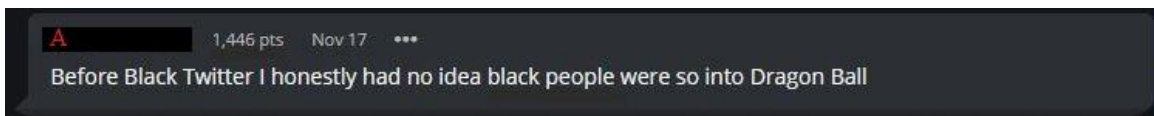
Figure 69. Black Twitter Shows Black Norms

A   70 pts   Feb 12 2015   •••
People really go out in public like that?
Reply
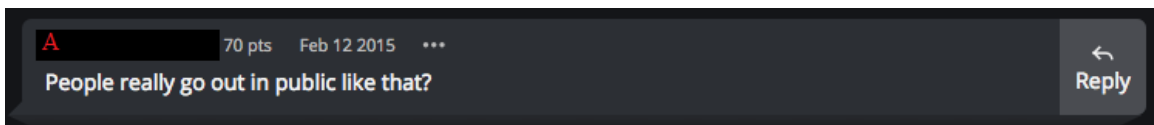
Figure 70. Black Twitter Shows Black Norms
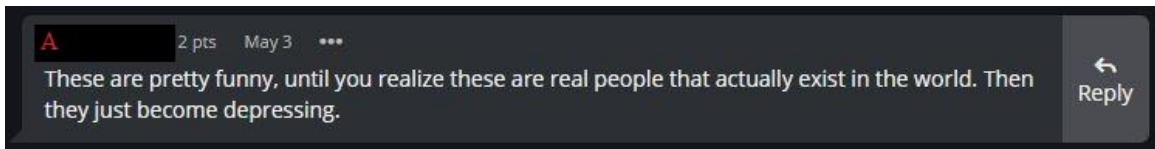
Figure 71. Black Twitter Shows Black Norms

What is striking about these comments is their acceptance by the Imgur

community. The first two are widely accepted, with Figure 69 exceeding 1400 points and

Figure 70 at 70 points. Figure 71 only has 2 points, so while I cannot conclude that it is a

widely-held opinion, I can conclude that it is not *rejected*, since it is not in the negatives.
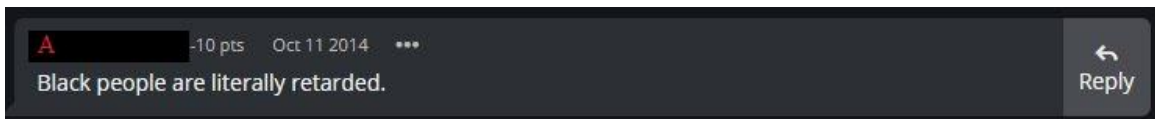
Figure 72. Black Twitter Shows Black Norms

While it is certainly the most volatile of these examples, Figure 72 nevertheless

shows that the author has seen Black Twitter and concludes that the behaviors therein are

both deplorable and pertain to *all* black people. There is no distinction made in his

proclamation of abhorrence; it is all black people that "are literally retarded." Ostensibly

because this comment exudes clear prejudice against black Americans, it has been

downvoted to -10 points.

These four comments all express that the images of Black Twitter are exemplary

of black experience in the United States. The first refers to "black people" as a solitary

group who all are interested in one cartoon, Dragonball Z, while the second and third

comments have a much more condescending tone. The fourth comment moves from

condescension to outright disgust. The Imgurian of Figure 70 is mystified that black people "go out in public like that," voicing his distaste and shock that "black people" dress as they do; Figure 71 is discouraged that such people "actually exist" in the world: he has judged what he has perceived to be the way of life for the black community as a whole. Figure 72, without offering any particular evidence, condemns all black people as "retarded."

As previously discussed, the way of life portrayed in the images of Black Twitter is none other than the iconic ghetto. Now that I have discussed the Imgurian expression that Black Twitter shows black norms, I can turn to the comments that they write about Black Twitter and black cultural stereotypes.

Cultural Stereotypes

The general, cultural stereotypes that Imgurians discuss in their comments are many of the same themes and stereotypes found in the Black Twitter images; this should come as no surprise, since the images are the content about which the users write their comments. While they do not discuss every stereotype of the black community and the iconic ghetto, many are included in their comments, including the assumption that black people are poor, they use drugs, their fathers are absent from their lives, their men are sexual predators, they are comedians that are funnier than white people, and they are uneducated.

Black People are Poor Criminals

    The Imgur community readily communicates that Black Twitter shows black norms. What are the norms that are communicated from Black Twitter images and reflected in their comments? Here I look at the common cultural stereotype of Black people as poor criminals, relying on the government and thievery to get by.
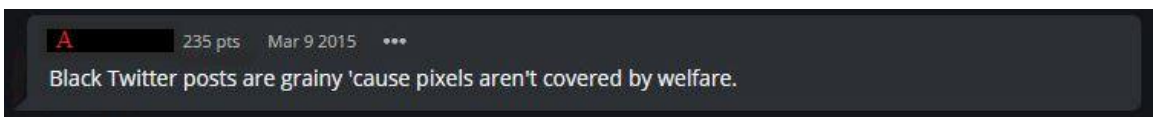
Figure 73. Black People are Poor
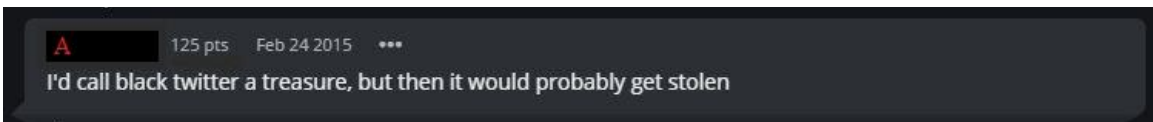
Figure 74. Black People are Thieves

    Figures 73 and 74 voice the common sentiment that black people are poor and thieves. Both use humor to express their viewpoints, and their opinions go uncontested. In fact, both comments received over 100 upvotes, which is more than enough for them to be among the top 10 comments on any given Black Twitter post. The community of Imgur approves both of these jokes and does not dispute what is said; they are not considered to be distasteful, inappropriate, or racist. Figure 73 explicitly ties the black community to welfare, insinuating that all black people are on welfare, and Figure 74 voices the stereotype that all black people steal in order to live their everyday lives. Both of these stereotypes echo those found among Black Twitter images. The following

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examples also reinforce a common Black Twitter image stereotype, that of widespread

drug use in the African American community.

Black People Use and Deal Drugs

      The first comment of Figure 75 below is quoting an Eminem rap, yet it alters the

lines to be about Black Twitter. The reply underneath follows this format and includes

the Imgurian's opinion about black people smoking weed and selling crack. The first

comment attains 44 points, making it a popular comment on Imgur, while the one below

it not only received 6 points but also is the highest scoring reply to that comment. The

sentiment expressed, that black people use and sell drugs, is seemingly uncontested and

in fact has been upvoted by several people.

Figure 75. Black People Use and Deal Drugs

Figure 76. Black People Use Drugs

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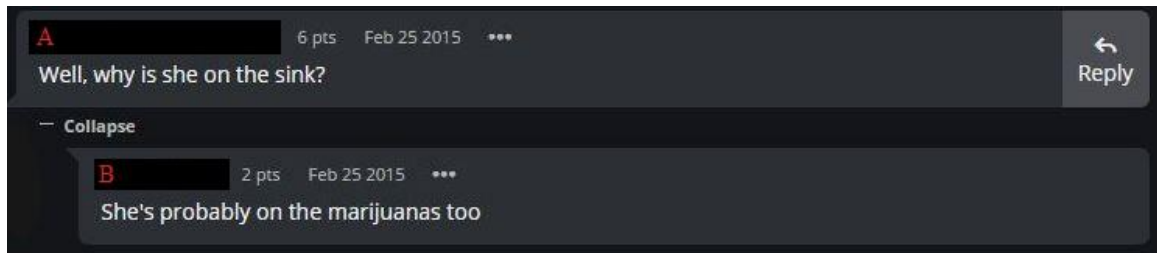
Figure 77. Black People Use Drugs

Figures 76 and 77 also connect black people to the use of drugs. In the dialogue

leading up to Figure 76, a man recounts some old friendships he used to have, saying that

he was selling drugs at the time and the black people that he knew had the drugs. In

Figure 76, he juxtaposes his race with the fact that he was selling drugs when he writes,

"Hahaha I mean, I am pretty white, I just was kinda selling drugs at the time…" In other

words, he says "though I am white, I was selling drugs." The lifestyle or decision to sell

drugs has been connected to what it means to be black in such a way that this Imgurian

acknowledged and clarified that his race and his actions are at odds with one another.

Figure 77 refers to a picture of a woman taking a "selfie" while standing on a bathroom

sink. The assumption of the Imgurian, upon seeing an odd behavior from a black woman,

is that she must be on drugs.

Finally, Figure 78 below is a particularly rich dialogue where the moniker "thug"

is connected to both "selling drugs n hood shit" and blackness, since the user remarks that

he, too, was not aware of what these phrases in question mean because he is "super

white." Let me begin at the start of this particular dialogue.

In response to Imgurian A asking why so many black people watch DragonBall Z,

Imgurian B comments that he had a thug roommate who would "trap all day" and play a

particular video game at night. User D asks a clarifying question, wondering "what does

'trap all day' mean?" This often happens with regards to Ebonics phrases on Imgur. User

B responds and answers the question, saying that "trap all day" means "selling drugs n

hood shit." He then reassures User D, dispelling any worries that he might be mocked for

asking a clarifying question, adding, "Don't worry I didn't know either I'm super white."
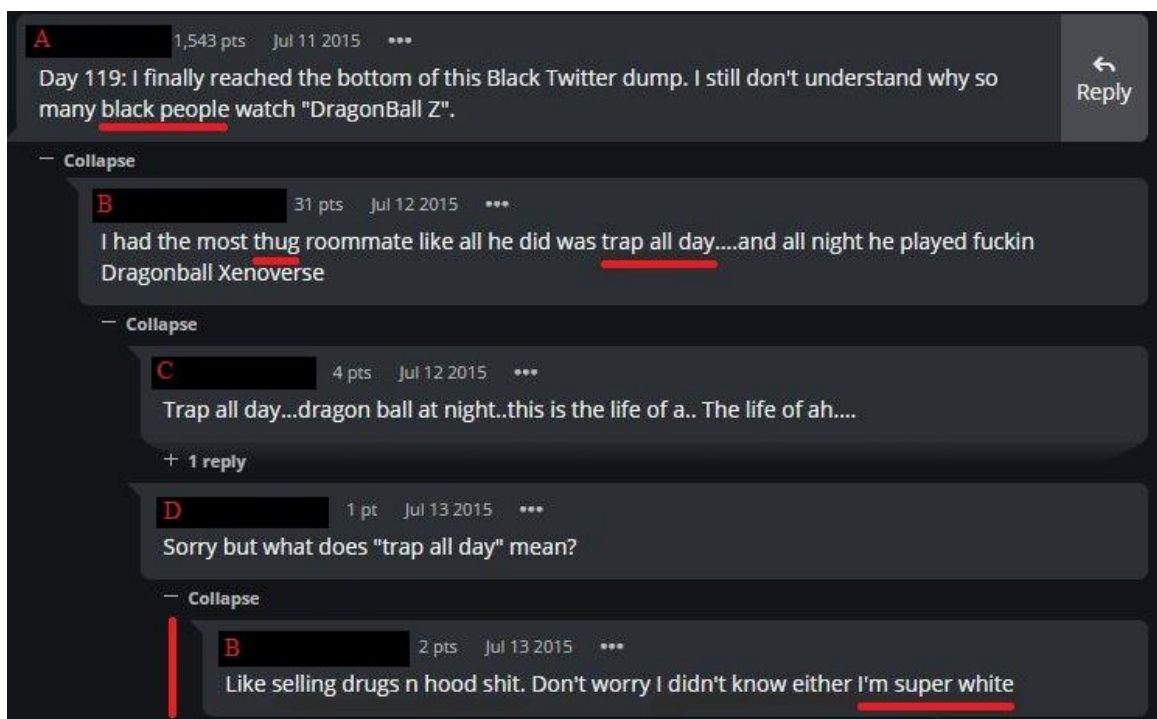
Figure 78. Black People Use Drugs

Several connections are being made in this dialogue. There is a connection

between black people, thugs, selling drugs, and doing "hood shit"; conversely, there is a

connection between whiteness and an ignorance concerning these things. Black skin,

therefore, becomes associated with selling drugs and other "hood shit." Notably, "hood

shit" remains unidentified, potentially invoking various negative connotations of the

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iconic ghetto. Whiteness, in contrast, becomes associated with ignorance, naivete, and innocence; it is black thugs who "trap all day," while white people have no part in these activities, not even understanding the slang used. This further separates white people from these actions. The conclusion is that black people are the ones who sell drugs and live thug lifestyles, *as is consonant* with their race; white people have no *innate* part in these activities, though they are able to join them *in spite of* their race.

Black Men are Absent Fathers

Another common trope found in the Black Twitter images that is echoed in the comments section is the stereotype of the absent black father.
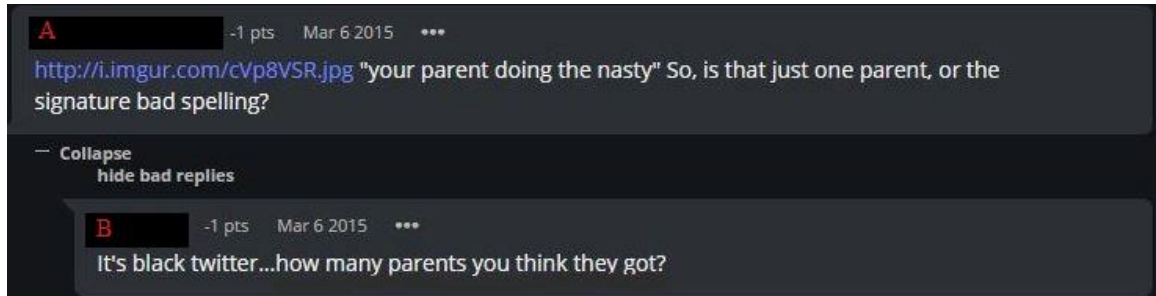
Figure 79. Black Absent Father
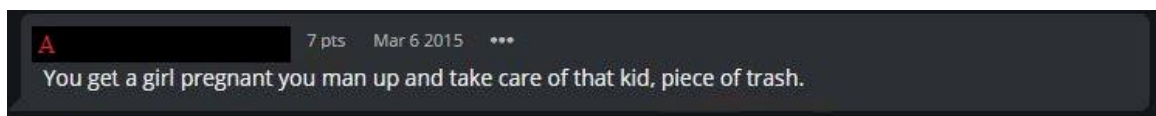
Figure 80. Black Absent Father

Figures 79 and 80 make general statements about black parents and black men specifically. The first refers to black parents, with the 2nd comment asking, "It's black

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twitter…how many parents you think they got?" This question is linking race to single

parenthood at best, and nonexistent parentage at worst. Figure 80 details one Imgurian's

anger towards a black male that expressed he would not care for the child of a woman

who he impregnated. The Imgurian uses a pejorative phrase to refer to the black man:

"piece of trash." Furthermore, he uses the phrase "man up," insinuating that this "piece of

trash" is fleeing his responsibilities and ought, instead, to face them and do what proper

men do. This links the black man's race to a devalued status (a piece of trash), bankrupt

morals, and an avoidance of respectable masculine behavior.

In addition to the words themselves, these comments must be briefly analyzed

with regards to the votes they receive. Figure 80 received 7 upvotes, indicating that 6

more people *upvoted* than downvoted this comment. This is a substantial amount of

upvotes, though not nearly enough to propel this comment to one of the top 10 comments

on a given post. Rather, it is more likely to be found in the top 10-20 comments, which is

still quite high when considering that there are often over 200 comments on Black

Twitter albums. A vote of 7 indicates acceptance by a handful of members from the

community; Imgurians found this sentiment agreeable and worthy of being upvoted. They

were not offended by either the tone or specific phrases used.

In contrast to this positive reception of Figure 80, User B in Figure 79 received -1

upvote for his comment, meaning a summation of two more people *downvoted* rather

than upvoted this comment, bringing it from 1 to -1. This indicates slight disagreement

from members of the community toward the opinion expressed therein. By itself, this

comment and its negative score would lead to the conclusion that the Imgur community

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rejects jokes made about absent black parents, finding such jokes offensive. Does this theme, perhaps, touch too close to home for Imgurians? However, this does not appear to be the case; the following comments push back against such a hasty conclusion.

Instead, perhaps it is the case that any given joke must be sufficiently funny to be accepted. Especially when overtly racist, opinions must be seen as ironic commentaries or clever, satirical jokes about race. In a color-blind space such as Imgur, members will not accept overtly racist statements by themselves. But, color-blind racism couched in sufficiently clever humor brings popularity.

Figure 81. Black Absent Father and Emotionally Distant

Figure 81 describes the assumption that black men are absent emotionally from their loved ones, especially their romantic partners and children. The first Imgurian asks, with an air of incredulity, "who would not go with their girlfriend to the abortion clinic"?

Two separate Imgurians (D & E) respond with near identical answers: "Black people" and "the blacks." All black men are ascribed this character trait: they do not care about their partner's emotional state; they will not go with their girlfriends as they make the difficult and emotionally taxing decision to have an abortion.
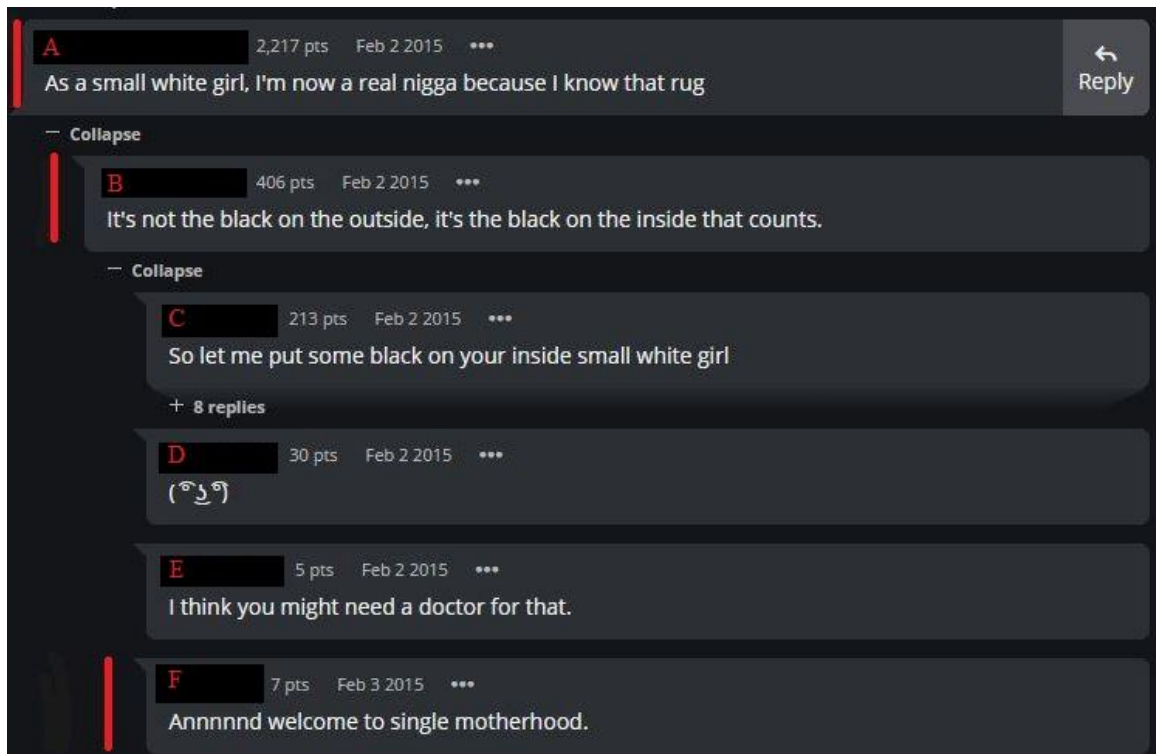
Figure 82. Black Absent Father

Figure 82, likewise, depicts an interaction wherein an Imgurian self-identifies as a small white girl, yet claims a "nigga" status because she had, in childhood, the same rug that was featured in a Black Twitter image. She then receives a reply to her comment from user B who says, "It's not the black on the outside, it's the black on the inside that counts." This is a euphemism for interracial sex, and is considered to be a sexual advance

by other Imgurians, as evidenced by Imgurians D and F in particular. This is explicitly verified by Imgurian C who makes the pick-up line even more apparent by writing, "So let me put some black on your inside small white girl," and Imgurian F who writes, "Annnnnd welcome to single motherhood." While I will soon investigate this dialogue for its focused male gaze and use of Ebonics, it is this final comment to which I turn to for evidence of the stereotype of the absent black father.

Imgurian F in Figure 82 makes the conclusion that if this black man has sex with this white woman, she should be prepared to enter into single motherhood. The black father of her child will not remain with her; she will be left alone to raise the child. This comment receives 7 votes, showing a moderate acceptance of this comment by the community. The inevitable conclusion of interracial sex, as user F sees it, is single parenthood. But as hinted above, the stereotype of single parenthood is not the only conclusion to be drawn from Imgurians' responses to this white woman. I turn now to examine the fetishization of interracial sex and expressions of femininity in this male dominated space.

Black Men and White Women: Interracial Fetishization and the Male Gaze

Hughey (2011) found that both an anti-racist white organization and a white nationalist organization constructed their understanding of white masculinity in part through a demarcation of sexual norms between whites and blacks. Black women were seen as sexually alluring, in line with the stereotype of Black Women as Sexually Promiscuous previously analyzed in Black Twitter images. Hughey recounts one

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"particularly disturbing" occasion in which he was invited over to a white nationalist's home, only to find on the television the title screen for a pornographic video dedicated solely to women of color (2011:146). He was confused initially, since a white nationalist would presumably never date or marry a black woman. The participant confirmed this, saying that he liked to watch women of color in pornographic material because they possessed a freedom, sensuality and sexual ability that white women simply did not have. But, when it came to marriage, he would only settle down with a "normal white girl," opposed to the black women depicted in the videos (Hughey 2011:147). Thus, white sexual identity is constructed as normative, but also dull and boring, while the sexuality of non-whites becomes deviant, and therefore forbidden and exciting. Examples of this are found both in Black Twitter images and in a common sentiment: white people are mocked for a bland appetite of both food and sexuality, as seen in Figures 83 and 84.
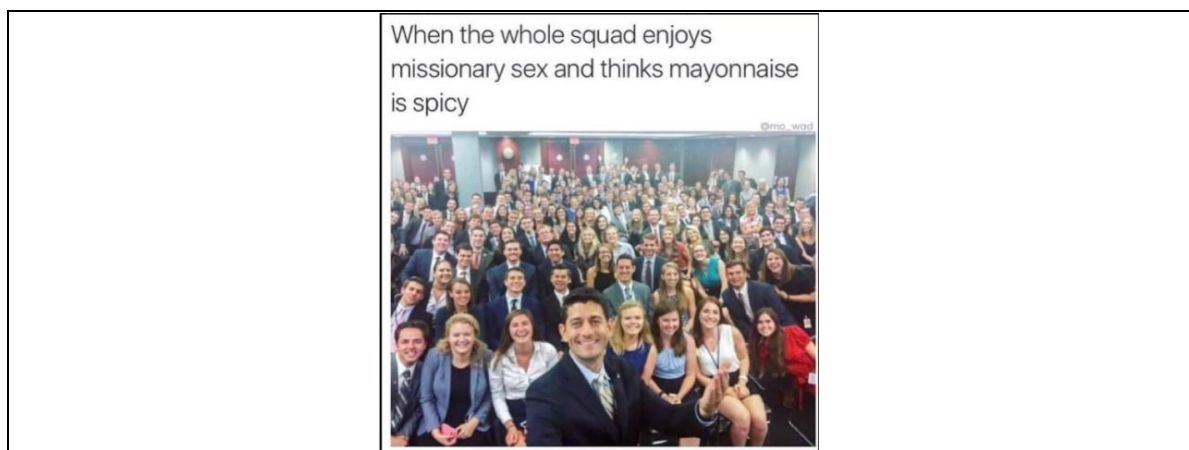
Figure 83. Bland White Sexuality

When the squad is down for frozen
yogurt and missionary intercourse

Figure 84. Bland White Sexuality

Interracial sex has become fetishized and titillating, garnering upvotes and replies that communicate acceptance within the community. One oddity about this fascination with interracial sex is that the historical sentiment of white men needing to protect white women from hypersexual black men fades away as interracial sex becomes a prized object of sexual fantasy. Though a startling amount of Black Twitter images about black men were coded with Black Male Hypersexuality (72 out of 140), I did not find any comments written by Imgurians that expressed a desire to save white women and protect them from black men or that vilified black men for their hypersexuality. Instead of anger and fear concerning black male bodies, there seems to be sexual excitement and enchantment.

Figure 85. Black Male Sexuality

In Figure 85, Imgurian A is commenting about the length of the Black Twitter album in which his comment is written, which was oddly shorter than they usually are. Thus, he calls it a "snack size" post. Imgurian B responds with another abnormality: "a black guy with a 3 inch Dick," to which Imgurian C replies with a concluding, saying that he did not think a 3 inch black penis existed. This is consonant with Collins' work, who wrote that elite white men have characterized the black male body as stronger and bigger than the white body, identifying black muscles and penises as their "most important sites" (2005:57).

This historical stereotype lives on in Imgurians' comments about black male sexuality. However, these users are not derided or scorned for their focus on the black penis; instead, user B receives 186 upvotes and user C receives 52, indicating moderate to extensive acceptance by the Imgur community of both comments. The primary example of the fetishization of interracial sex and preoccupation with black male sexuality comes from a particularly rich dialogue, seen below.

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Figure 86. Interracial Fetishization

I have already analyzed this dialogue with reference to memesis and the black absent father stereotype, but now I focus on the sexual motifs contained therein. This dialogue begins with Imgurian A self-identifying as a small white girl, and her comment is unrelated to sexual content of any kind: she is referencing a Black Twitter image of a well-known children's playroom rug. Imgurian B responds with a comment that references Imgurian A's "real" or inner race and also alludes to interracial sex. Imgurian C removes the ambiguity from this allusion through his sexual advance toward her, writing "So let me put some black on your inside small white girl." The two responses that follow, written by Imgurians D and E, congratulate C for his witty, clever comment.

The final, concluding reply from F indicates that interracial sex is that particular Imgurian's sexual fetish.

All of these comments receive positive scores, ranging from 2217 to 17. The opinions expressed by these Imgurians are all accepted by the community at large. Though her comment had nothing to do with sexuality, shortly after identifying as a woman, Imgurian A is approached sexually by a presumably black Imgurian, who is then praised for his sexual advance and affirmed. This confirms that interracial sex is an object of titillation and excitement. Naming interracial sex as a fetish is a far cry from the historical stereotype of white men protecting "their women" from the brutish hypersexuality of black men. Instead, on Imgur I find white men, of their own accord, bringing up black male penises and admitting a fetish for interracial sex.

This dialogue also aligns with research done on female interactions with males in male-dominated digital spaces. While the internet was initially thought to be a space that would allow users to interact more like disembodied minds without prejudice than like flesh and blood with the accompanying social stigmas, it has not proven to be a space in which individuals are able to recreate themselves wholly anew (Daniels 2009b). Instead, individuals bring biases and prejudices online (Fahs and Gohr 2012). Of interest here are the cultural understandings of gender that exist in digital spaces generally and Imgur specifically.

Research into gender in online spaces concludes that individuals enter into online spaces that they feel are consonant with their identity, as they understand it; they seek out websites and communities that uphold the boundaries they are comfortable with, rather

than seeking websites that would challenge their own beliefs and present alternative

gender role perspectives (Daniels 2009b). Subsequently, it is normative for a websites or

community to reify the majority of users' dominant understanding of gender, leading to

an expectation of conformity for all who enter a particular digital space. For example, in

an ethnography of the text-only online community of "BlueSky," Kendall found that the

prevalence of white men shaped the culture of that community so that those accepted into

the community were those "who [could] fit themselves into a culture by and for those

white men" (2000:272).

This is what I find on Imgur; it is a male dominated space that has a focused gaze

on any females who self-identify as such. There is often an immediate attempt of a sexual

advance, and memetic phrases have developed that guide these interactions. The most

commonly observed memetic phrase is "Prepare your inbox." Imgurians write this phrase

when a self-identifying female writes a comment that expresses they are sexually

available or that is perceived as sexually provocative or enticing. This phrase refers to the

direct, private messages that Imgurians can send to one another, which arrive in the user's

"inbox." The threat, which females are being prepared for, is receiving private messages

containing "dick pics," or personal pictures that men have taken of their penises.

However, "inbox" is also an allusion to the vagina. Often, one user will write,

"Prepare your inbox" and another will reply, writing, "both of them" or "all of them,"

plainly making the allusion to vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Figure 87 is an example of one

female Imgurian warning another after she has identified as a "lady."

Figure 87. A Warning Toward a Female Imgurian

Below is a comment written in reference to Figure 88, already seen before with reference to a bland white sexuality. In Figure 89, the Imgurian is writing that he would happily have sex with most of the women shown in Figure 88.
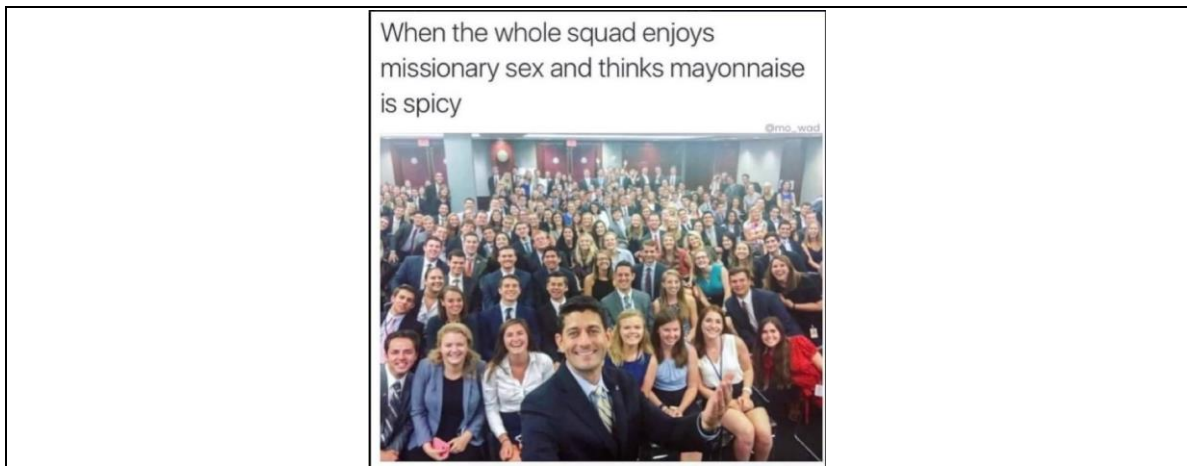
Figure 88. Focused Male Gaze

Figure 89. Focused Male Gaze

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Women are routinely the objects of sexual pursuit and sexual gratification in the white, male-dominated space of Imgur. Furthermore, interracial sex is an object of admiration and enchantment. This is counter to the historical stereotype of whi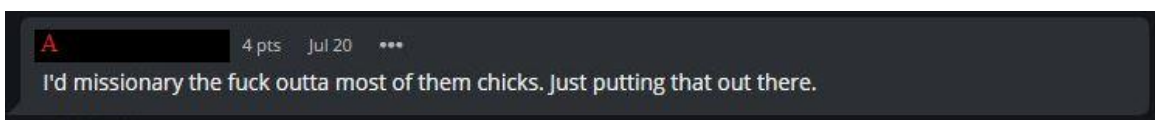te men who must protect white women from hypersexual black men. Instead, black men are revered for their strong, dominant bodies. I move now from the bodies of black men and white women to the words of black people and role of Ebonics on Imgur.

Ebonics on Imgur

Ebonics holds a curious place in Black Twitter on Imgur. Many of the images' captions are written in Ebonics, and so many Imgurians have taken to expressing their opinions by commenting on Black Twitter posts in Ebonics (recall that 85% of Imgur is white) (Mikal et al. 2015). Common Ebonics phrases used include "af," (as fuck) "finna," (going to) "fam," (family) and "smh" (shaking my head) and explicitly racist language, such as "nigger" and "nigga." Ebonics is peculiar on Imgur because users admit they do not use this language in "real life," when they are not on Imgur, as seen in Figure 90 below. Instead, using Ebonics becomes part of the memetic phrases that are expected of users so that they might be granted the currency or mark of status on Imgur, the upvote.

Such use of Ebonics is neutral with regard to its validity as a manner of speaking. The phrases employed are not criticized, nor are those who routinely use them (presumably African Americans) derided. Instead, Imgurians employ these phrases because it is the expected behavior when commenting on Black Twitter Albums, as seen

in Figure 90. Several examples of this non-threatening, uncritical use of Ebonics are seen

below:
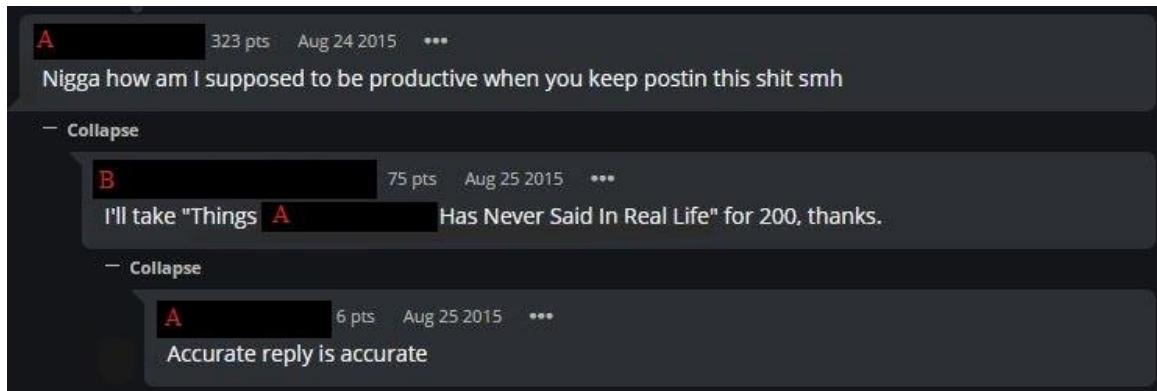
Figure 90. Imgurians Using Ebonics

In Figure 90 above, Imgurian A uses Ebonics twice: he says "Nigga" and "smh."

User B replies to this comment, saying "I'll take 'Things [Imgurian A] Has Never Said In

Real Life" for 200, thanks." Imgurian A then confirms this lighthearted accusation,

saying that user B is correct in what he has written: it is true that Imgurian A has never

said, in "real life," either "Nigga" or "smh." While this is only one example, it is a

common sentiment expressed throughout the comments section on Black Twitter albums:

Imgurians employ Ebonics on Imgur while they do not employ the same language or

phrases when they are offline, in "real life." Indeed, since user B's reply has 75 upvotes, I

can conclude that a large number of community members agree with his sentiment. They

all know that these are things that are written on Imgur only, not spoken offline.
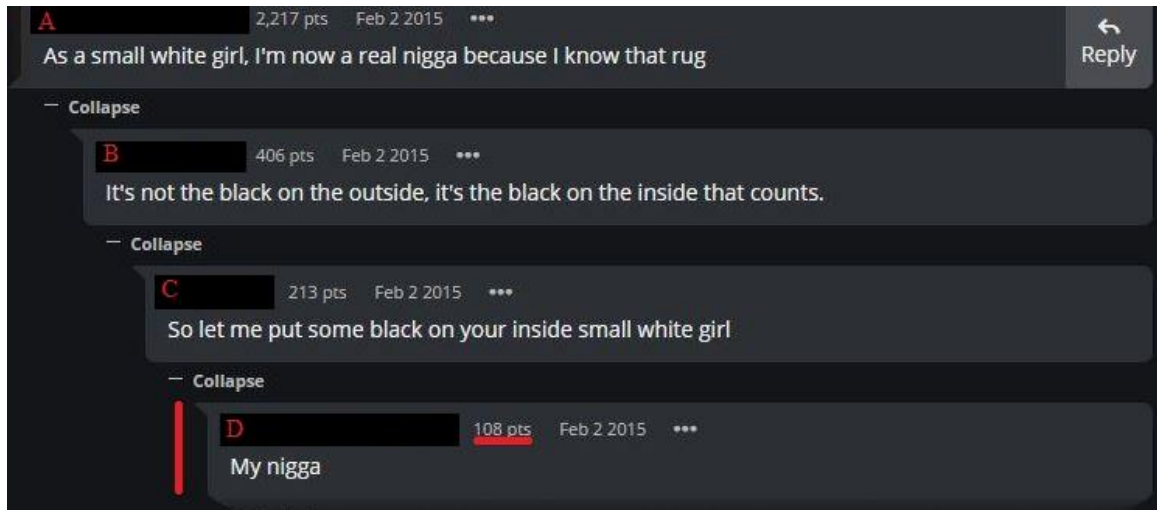
Figure 91. Imgurians Using Ebonics

I have already observed the dialogue in Figure 91, though now I focus on the use

of Ebonics within it. This is seen in the Imgurian D's direct response to C: Imgurian D

responds with "My nigga" to C, who wrote, "So let me put some black on your inside

small white girl." Imgurian D is egging C on, congratulating his witty pick-up line by

using Ebonics. This use of Ebonics is expected and rewarded; Imgurian D's comment

received 108 upvotes, indicating extensive acceptance by the Imgur community.
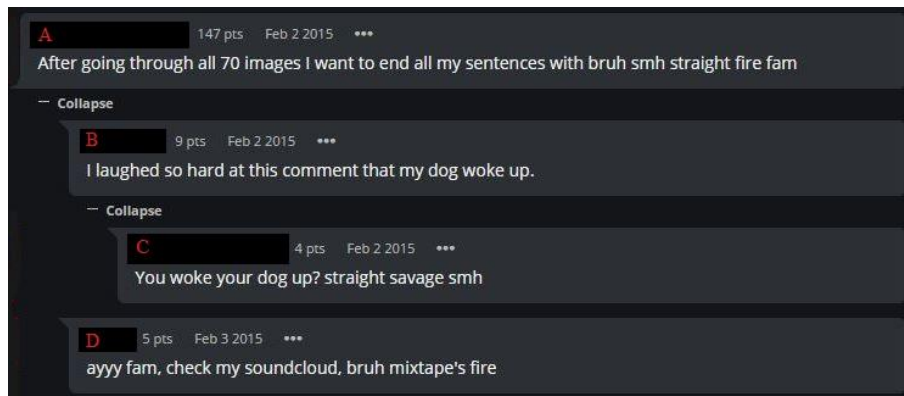
Figure 92. Imgurians Using Ebonics

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Figure 92 shows a dialogue in which the Imgurians are commenting on the cognitive effect that a Black Twitter album of 70 images is having on them. Imgurian A writes that he wants to use Ebonics after going through all 70 images, citing specific examples of what he means: "bruh," "smh," "straight fire," and "fam." He receives 147 votes, showing extensive acceptance for his comment. Imgurian B comments that he found A's comment funny; C responds with an Ebonics phrase: "straight savage smh." In response to the first comment, Imgurian D has written a comment that is comprised solely of Ebonics, seemingly to show his solidarity and agreement with Imgurian A; he writes, "ayyy fam, check my soundcloud, bruh mixtape's fire." This comment receives 5 votes, a small amount, though still evidencing acceptance by the community.
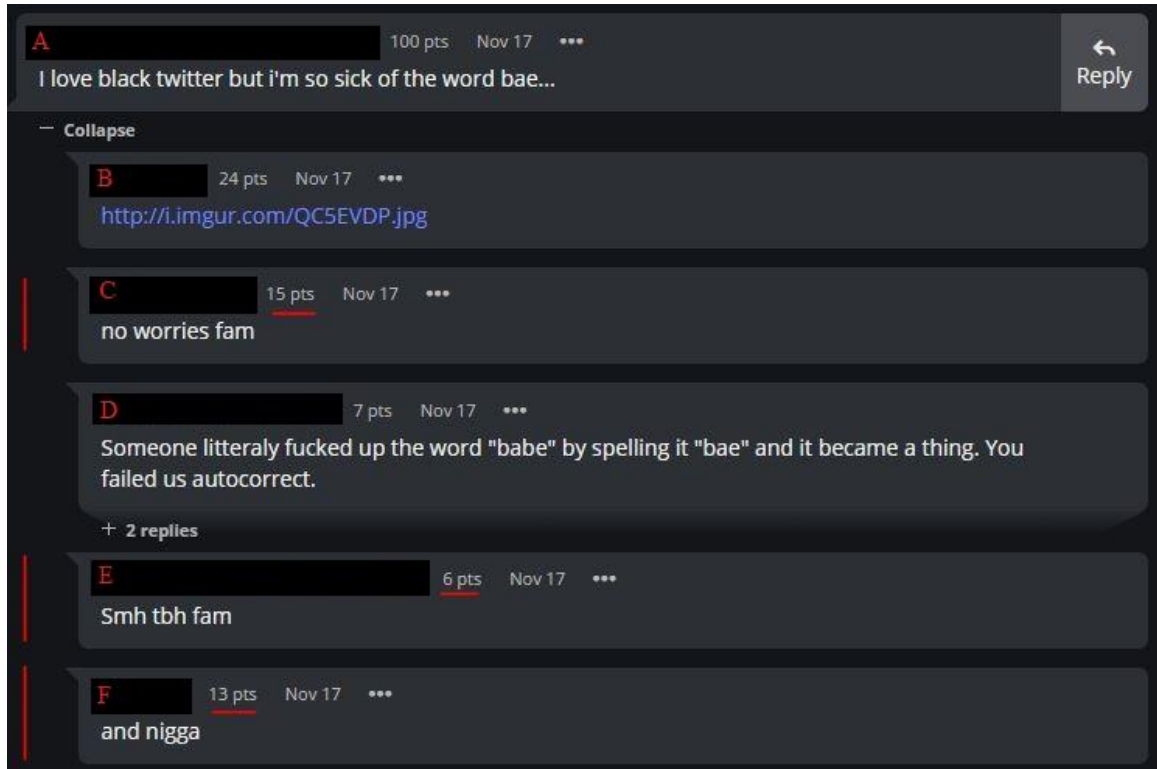
Figure 93. Imgurians Using Ebonics

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Finally, in Figure 93 Imgurian A expresses that he is becoming sick of a particular Ebonics word, "bae." In this dialogue, there is somewhat of a shift from merely using Ebonics to critiquing it; while the first commenter, Imgurian A, expresses his distaste for the word "bae," other Imgurians respond to him with Ebonics phrases, seemingly in an effort to annoy the user with more phrases, since what they write does not address his specific sentiment in any clear fashion. Imgurian C writes, "no worries fam" and Imgurian E writes, "smh tbh fam." It seems that these two Imgurians are writing irrelevant Ebonics and memetic phrases. Contrasting with C and E, Imgurian F seems to agree with the original commenter, Imgurian A, and is adding that he is also sick of the word, "nigga." Note that *all* of these comments, though they are at odds with one another, have received upvotes (100, 15, 6, and 13, respectively), denoting acceptance by the community.

Therefore, within one dialogue there is a subtle push and pull, representative of the conflicting views of Imgurians toward Ebonics. Some use it to garner upvotes, using memetic phrases containing Ebonics so that they will be accepted by the community; others express distaste, boredom, and resistance against seeing and using these phrases. Both positions are *accepted* in the Imgur community; both viewpoints expressed have received upvotes. Some Imgurians agree with those who use Ebonics, and others agree with those who are tired of seeing them. But, importantly, neither group sees these particular expressions as offensive or improper enough to downvote them to a negative score. Where there is temperance, there is tolerance. This is one hint that Imgur is a

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color-blind space. What I turn to now are far more explicit resistances against Ebonics, evidence of what Ronkin and Karn call anti-Ebonics ideologies (1999).

Anti-Ebonics Ideologies

Some Imgurians push back against using Ebonics, criticizing other users and the presumed authors of Black Twitter images, black Americans. The effect of this is a conflation of black skin with Ebonics, the assumption that all black people speak in Ebonics. Most Imgurians with anti-Ebonics ideologies follow the patterns outlined by Ronkin and Karn who found parodies of Ebonics in online forums (1999). They described the anti-Ebonics ideologies that they observed as encompassing "viewpoints ranging from benign (uninformed) linguistic prescriptivism to victim-bashing and blatant racism" (1999:362). I find similar behaviors in comments on Imgur: Imgurians mock Ebonics parodies in the same fashion as those researched by Ronkin and Karn (1999). Some string together incoherent sentences using typical Ebonics phrases and excessively vulgar language to relegate Ebonics to the status of an improper slang. Others question the value of the Ebonics phrases and words, asserting their educational status and way of speaking as normative, and expressing their distaste for common, ghetto, and lower class speech patterns and those who use them. Let me now turn to examples of these anti-Ebonics ideological strategies.

First, below is an image from Black Twitter that was examined earlier in the findings: it depicts a supposedly black person's confusion about white people's illogical behavior, commenting that white people engage in dangerous acts yet are scared of black

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people and so lock their doors when they see them. In Figure 95 an Imgurian comments

with his responses to this particular Black Twitter image.

Figure 94. Mocking White People

Figure 95. Anti-Ebonics Ideologies

This comment is a parody of proper Ebonics usage, as there is an excessive

amount of dropping final the final "g" as in "futhahfuckin'" and "jackin'" and dropping

the first "t" in "Thas" (Ronkin and Karn 1999). Furthermore, the word "futhahfuckin" is

not a legitimate Ebonics phrase at all. Ronkin and Karn also found the hyper-use of "be"

in mock Ebonics parodies, as is found in this comment when the Imgurian writes, "don't

be jackin'…" (1999). In these ways, some anti-Ebonics comments on Imgur mirror older

styles of parodying Ebonics.

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Second, some Imgurians string together Ebonics words and vulgar expressions into gibberish in order to malign Ebonics as illegitimate slang. Though one comment in Figure 96 does contain a parody of Ebonics as in Figure 95, two others convey scorn for Ebonics through jumbled, rambling sentences.

Figure 96. Anti-Ebonics Ideologies

Here, Imgurian B does engage in a slight parody of Ebonics in his first comment, writing "You a nigga. Is you not even listening?" In the remaining two replies, one by Imgurian C and the final one by Imgurian B again, they engage in using Ebonics and vulgar language (here, excessive, common curses) and so express their anti-Ebonics ideology as they relegate Ebonics to the status of incoherent slang. Imgurian C writes, "Bruh. He a punk ass bitch ass nigga" while Imgurian B responds with "Motherfuckin trick ass ho ass pussy ass punk ass bitch ass nigga."

In Figure 97 there is the same incoherence, followed by a question about how other individuals type in this fashion, since smart phones and computers ought to hinder their ability to type in Ebonics. This Imgurian is expressing that Ebonics is unnatural and should automatically be corrected by contemporary technologies, which rightly reinforce linguistic norms for society. Imgurian A writes, "Finna ima talkmbout cuh dun nuttin Bruh fam ur tryna abt imma."
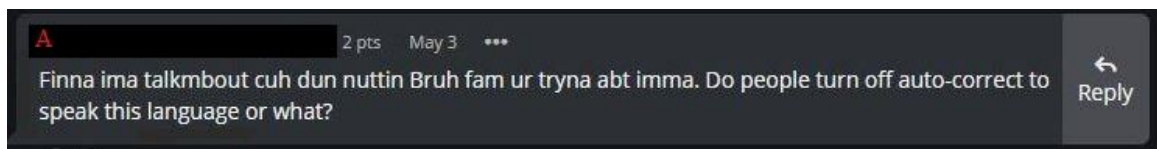
Figure 97. Anti-Ebonics Ideologies
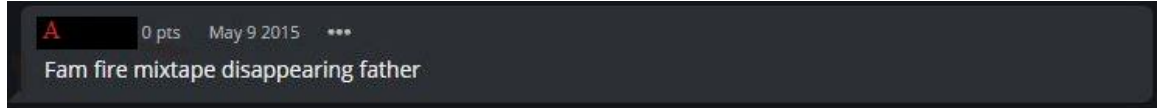
Figure 98. Anti-Ebonics Ideologies

Finally, in Figure 98, there is a cooccurrence of Ebonics gibberish with a common stereotype about African Americans, that of absent fathers. User A writes, "Fam fire mixtape disappearing father." Though short, the words are not in a logical order (normal usage would reverse the order, in fact, to '[that] mixtape fire, fam') and are thus gibberish, with the concluding phrase naming the black absent father stereotype. This comment therefore shows the user's opposition to Ebonics while linking Ebonics to the common cultural stereotype about African American men, absent fatherhood.

Third, some Imgurians directly question the value of Ebonics and belittle it to the status of uneducated slang that only "ghetto" people speak. They assume the normativity of their own speech patterns; Ebonics becomes a status indicator that serves as a racial outgroup marker (Ronkin and Karn 1999).

A   5 pts   May 3   •••
Why is ghetto speak more common than clear, concise text in humorous photos?
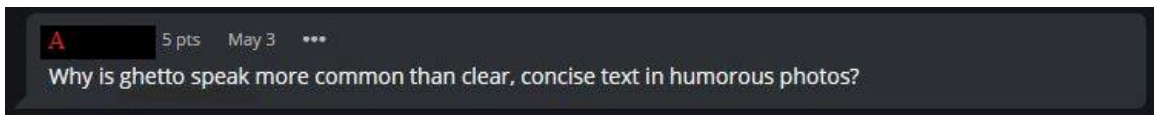
Figure 99. Anti-Ebonics Ideologies

The Imgurian in Figure 99 refers to Ebonics texts as "ghetto," tacitly equating ghetto with Ebonics and African Americans. Contrasted with this is what the user calls "clear, concise text." This is somewhat ironic because, in many instances, Ebonics phrases are more concise than other alternatives, rather than verbose. It appears, then, that this user employs a wide vocabulary to maintain a position of superiority over what he deems to be a lower-status, inferior manner of speaking.

A   6 pts   May 3   •••
What happened to the English language?
— Collapse
    B   1 pt   May 3   •••
    Exactly what I was thinking.

↩ Reply
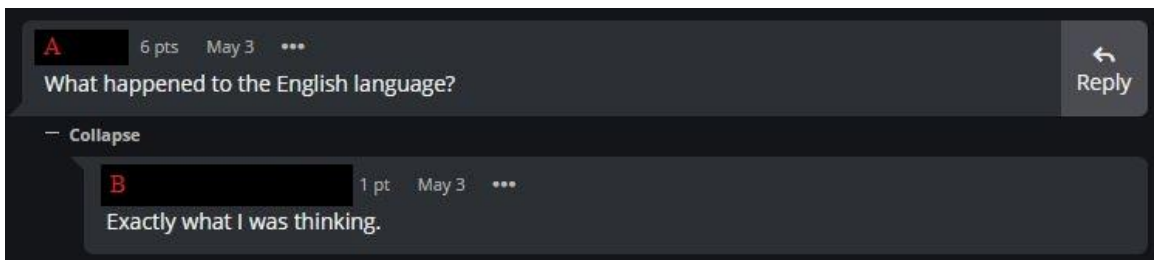
Figure 100. Anti-Ebonics Ideologies
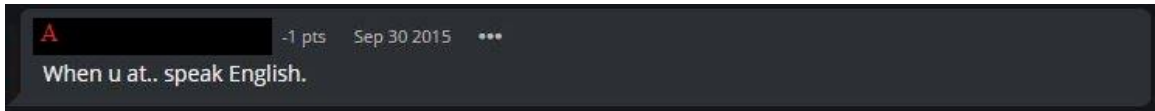
Figure 101. Anti-Ebonics Ideologies

In Figures 100 and 101, "English" is held up as the standard, with the unspoken assumption that Ebonics is not English. Through this simple juxtaposition, the Imgurians malign Ebonics itself and those who use it. While Figure 100 receives a few upvotes, evidence of slight acceptance by the Imgur community, Figure 101 has a score of -1, meaning that 2 more people downvoted this comment. Figure 101 is not accepted by those who saw it, while Figure 100 is. This points to the factions at odds with one another on Imgur; while some disagree with the blunt assertion to "speak English" as in Figure 101, more agree with the tone of the sentiment expressed in Figure 100.

Figure 102, the final example of these trends on Imgur, contains a dialogue that not only shows an example of anti-Ebonics ideologies, but also gives evidence of the color-blind nature of this community and raises an important question about social steganography and Ebonics.

Figure 102. Anti-Ebonics Ideologies

In this dialogue, Imgurian A writes, "Ebonics.. words for dumb people." Such a bold, clear statement that ties Ebonics to stupidity is not tolerated on Imgur: this comment has reached a score of -44, which is exceedingly low. Three users express their displeasure with A's comment; B writes, "Or slang? Words young people," implying that perhaps Ebonics is slang that young people use, rather than dumb people; C writes, "the fuck," merely expressing his visceral reaction to such a hostile comment' D writes, "Found the racist!" All of these comments have received positive scores: 17, 9, and 8, respectively, showing that the Imgur community accepts and appreciates their contributions while rejecting Imgurian A's comment.

The first response, written by Imgurian B, and the last response, written by Imgurian D, are particularly illuminating. Imgurian B questions whether or not it is truly Ebonics that Imgurians are reading in these Black Twitter posts. Perhaps, instead, they are reading slang phrases that are known by a particular age group rather than a particular

racial background. This comment is positively received by Imgurians; it receives 17 upvotes. This indicates that some Imgurians agree with Imgurian B; what may appear to be Ebonics to some people is perceived by other Imgurians as general slang used by "young people." This exemplifies that social steganography is at work in this digital space, as the phrases in Black Twitter images and the memetic phrases written in the comments may be general slang or interpreted as such, rather than as Ebonics.

However, Figure 102 contains the only comment I found which explicitly pointed to slang, rather than to Ebonics, as the source of the particularized language and phrases written on Black Twitter images and in the comments. This leads me to conclude that while some Imgurians may perceive that Black Twitter posts are written in generic slang, the majority perceive that they are written in Ebonics. Evidence for Imgurians perceiving the specific phrases of Black Twitter as Ebonics rather than slang can also be found in Figure 78, previously examined, in which the Imgurians tie language and behavior to race, rather than to age.

Contrary to Imgurian B, who cites general slang as the source of the phrases found in Black Twitter posts, Imgurian D writes, "Found the racist!" This comment attained a score of 8, evidencing slight acceptance by the Imgur community. Though race is not previously mentioned in this dialogue, by his response Imgurian D affirms that Ebonics and stupidity are understood to be connected to black people in America. Therefore, one reason Imgurian A's comment was downvoted so harshly is that it was perceived as explicitly racist, which is unacceptable in a color-blind space.

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In the following section of my findings, I examine Imgur as a color-blind space. I find competing ideologies at work, as many Imgurians voice explicitly racist opinions, while others push back against them. Additionally, veiled language and humor continue to mask the coded language in which race is discussed in this digital space.

Discussions of Race in a Color-Blind Space

Color-blind racism hinges on covert, veiled, and coded language that appeals to liberal ideals in the abstract, while shifting from focusing on biological markers of race to cultural ones, therefore rooting distinctions in white and black lifestyles as natural and simply the way things are. The crowning cry of the color-blind racist is, "Hey, at least things aren't as bad as they used to be!" (Bonilla-Silva 2002; 2003). Additionally, color-blind racists will appeal to famous "token" and "safe minorities" or personal relationships with African Americans to deflect charges of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

While I see these color-blind racism markers on Black Twitter posts on Imgur, I also find its opposite: overt, hostile racism wherein Imgurians proclaim quite explicit racial views, using racial slurs and voicing their own frustration about the current color-blind era that demands covert speech. On Imgur, I find adherents to color-blind racism, those that have imbibed its influence, and those who resist the current "politically correct" color-blind domination of public spaces.

Imgur is therefore a space ripe for the creation and reproduction of competing white identities. Many of the patterns Hughey (2010) found in a white nationalist group and a white anti-racist group are present in racialized discourse on Black Twitter albums:

white victimization; Black pathologies attributed to biology *and* culture, thereby distinguishing and elevating a white racial identity against Black pathologies; and white debt and "epidermal" capital, in which whites attempt to coopt and claim traditions and mannerisms that are understood to be non-white, as a way to overcome the perceived dreariness, emptiness, and dullness of whiteness.

First, I will turn to comments surrounding common discussions on Imgur: "Is Black Twitter racist?" and "Are we supposed to be color-blind or not?" I will also highlight the ways and conditions in which Imgurians oppose overt racism. Finally, I will close my analysis of the comments on Imgur by looking at comments that show competing white racial identities.

Meta-Discourse: Is Black Twitter Racist?

The first comments to examine are those in which Imgurians are arguing over whether or not Black Twitter by itself is racist. In the first example, Figure 103, I revisit an earlier comment which said, "Black Twitter posts are grainy 'cause pixels aren't covered by welfare." This comment was exceedingly well received by the community although it contains overt racism. The cleverness and humor of this initial comment is enough to garner upvotes and approval rather than downvotes and disapproval. This is an example of the overt racism, rather than color-blind racism, that Imgurians praise.

Figure 103. Is Black Twitter Racist?

However, several Imgurians contest this racist joke written by Imgurian A.

Imgurian C writes, "Imagine if you had to be creative and not rely on lazy racism to be

funny." This user accuses A of racism for the joke that he makes about Black Twitter and

welfare. However, the Imgur community greatly *disapproves* of this contrary opinion:

C's comment receives a score of -15, which is a high amount of downvotes as far as

negative comments are concerned. Imgurian D similarly voices their hesitancy about

Black Twitter posts and the jokes made about them, writing, "This seems to [be] the

modern version of going to see ethnic people in a zoo and staring in wonder at their ways

and customs." This opinion too is downvoted, though to a startlingly low score of -31

points. I contend that these individuals speak out of a highly-sensitive, color-blind racist

frame in which even racist *jokes* are inappropriate and must be squelched. But apparently, the rest of the Imgur community disagrees with them in this instance; the majority find racist jokes, if funny enough, to be acceptable.

Two Imgurians reply to Imgurian D's comment, saying, "Or they're just hilarious" and "It's not an actual GROUP that nonblack folk flock to for entertainment. Just random black ppl who are funnier than other (white) ppl." Note that both of these comments received *positive* scores; these opinions, *defending* Imgurian A and his initial, overtly racist comment, are rewarded by the community. Despite F's insistence that they are not mocking a whole group of people, he still contrasts this "black" humor with "white" humor, bringing to the forefront racial distinctions and thereby reifying a difference between the two races. What follows are several simple comments in which Imgurians are voicing their frustration with Black Twitter as a racist practice.
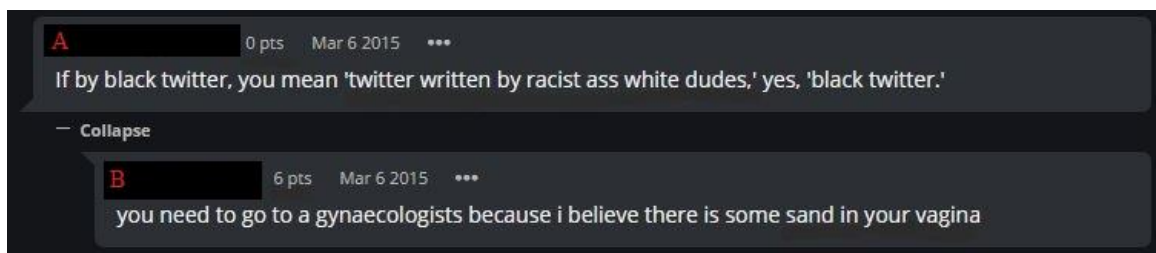
Figure 104. Is Black Twitter Racist?

Figure 105. Is Black Twitter Racist?
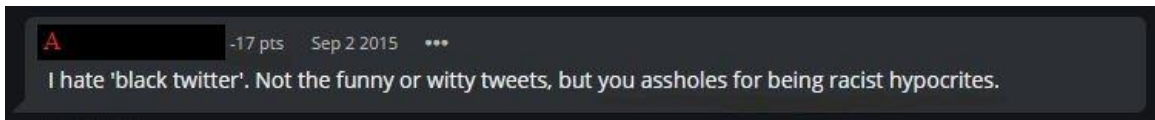
Figure 106. Is Black Twitter Racist?
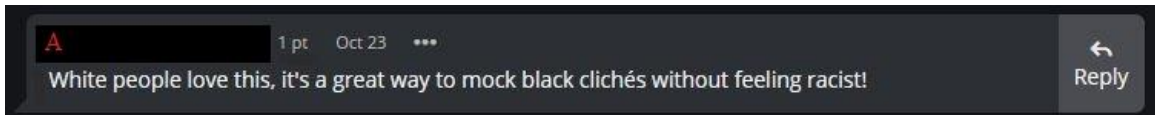
Figure 107. Is Black Twitter Racist?
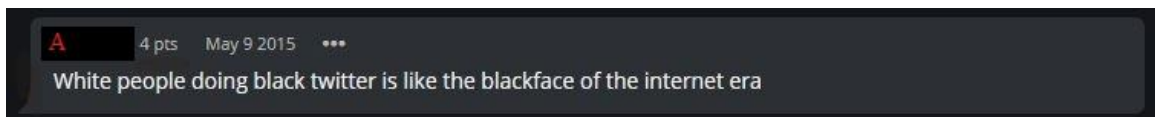
Figure 108. Is Black Twitter Racist?

These comments in Figures 104-108 show that there are a number of Imgurians who are uncomfortable with Black Twitter on Imgur. However, their concerns are either lightly tolerated or completely rejected, as seen in the scores of the comments and the arguments that can result, as in Figure 104. The comments received scores of 0, 1, -17, 1, and 4, respectively; none of them received even a moderate amount of upvotes, and one had a score of -17, which is quite low for a negatively-scored comment. All but one of these comments level the charge of racism at other Imgurians; the comment that received -17 votes also called Imgurians "assholes," which is perhaps why he was downvoted so harshly. The comment that received positive votes (Figure 108, up to a score of 4) was the only comment to abstain from calling Imgurians racists, instead using history to compare and contrast Black Twitter to blackface.

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Figure 104 achieved 0 points, while the reply underneath it attained 6 points; the

initial accusation of racism was rejected, and the rebuttal is praised. This is particularly

striking because Imgurian B genders his response, calling to mind the previous discussion

of femininity and the male gaze in digital spaces. Not only are females routinely sexually

objectified on Imgur, they also are relegated to a social standing in which their

physiological anatomy is used as an acceptable insult that connotes irritability.

Taken together, the conclusion to be drawn about whether or not Imgurians

express that Black Twitter is racist is a resounding "no." They do not, as a majority,

consider their actions to be racist or problematic. Couched in humorous, clever, and

oftentimes memetic phrases, they see themselves as simply having a good time, cracking

harmless jokes. However, Hall writes that entertainment is one of the primary ways that

people "*encounter* race without having to *confront* the racism of the perspectives in use"

(1981:42; italics in original). Humor is neither amoral nor value-neutral.

There are some who resist these racist jokes, but they are the minority viewpoint,

and their opinions are downvoted; subsequently, due to the interface and architecture of

the website, their opinions are not valued and become hidden. Imgurians must

purposefully seek them out in order to view their controversial opinions. What is popular

on Imgur reigns supreme: clever, witty, overtly racists jokes.

However, what is unacceptable on Imgur are overtly racist statements that are *not*

jokes; the community rejects opinions that seem possessed more by rage than comedy. In

this, it seems that Imgurians accept overtly racist comments if they are "just jokes," yet

reject overtly racist comments that seem genuine or mean-spirited. Therefore, most

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Imgurians seem to operate out of a color-blind framework, as they reject overtly racist

opinions that are "serious" in their condemnations of African Americans.

Overt Racism Opposed

The first example of Imgurians opposing overt racism is a dialogue examined

earlier as an example of anti-Ebonics ideology:

Figure 109. Overt Racism Opposed

As previously stated, Imgurian A criticizes Ebonics and is downvoted harshly for this

view, with his comment reaching a score of -44, exceedingly low for a negative

comment. All three Imgurians who respond to his comment push back against his overtly

racist claim, the last one explicitly bringing race into the discussion. Imgurian D writes,

"Found the racist!" affirming that Imgurian A was tying Ebonics not only to stupidity but

also to blackness. Therefore, he deems Imgurian A to be a racist.

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This proclamation that he is racist, as well as the other two comments that resisted his claim, all received positive scores of 8, 17, and 9, respectively. The community has rejected A's comment as racist and unacceptable, while praising those who resist him by granting them upvotes. Here, the community rejects overt racism that appears to be serious rather than comedic.

The following dialogue flawlessly states this issue. An Imgurian writes a comment that others deem to be inappropriate, and the first response indicates precisely *why* it is inappropriate:

Figure 110. Overt Racism Opposed

Imgurian A, who deleted his comment, received a score of -8 points. Imgurians did not accept what he wrote. The immediate reply from Imgurian B is, "Unfunny and uncool." This same user clarifies later that Imgurian A's comment said there cannot be working black people, alluding to the Blacks as Lazy stereotype. Such a statement is too genuine,

too overtly racist, for Imgurians to tolerate it. Imgurian B's first response says that what Imgurian A wrote was "Unfunny." This is the first thing mentioned as Imgurian B pushes back against A's comment. Something that is racist and *unfunny* will not be upvoted on Imgur. The implication is that only something racist and *funny* will receive upvotes.

In the examples that follow are simple, overtly racist statements about black people that have all been downvoted into negative scores. The Imgur community at large does not accept these comments as legitimate, valid discourse for the community.
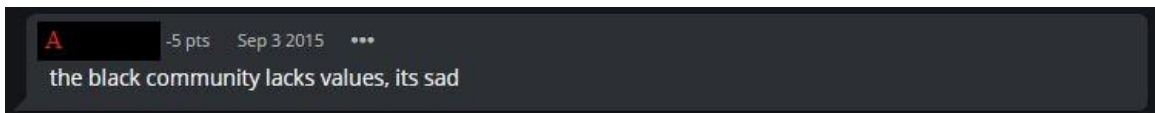
Figure 111. Overt Racism Opposed
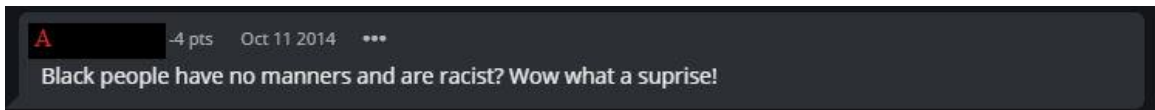
Figure 112. Overt Racism Opposed

Figure 113. Overt Racism Opposed
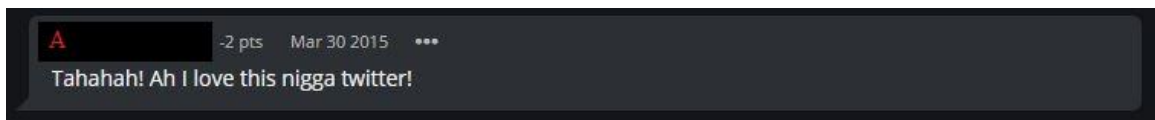
Figure 114. Overt Racism Opposed

All of these examples, from Figures 111 to 114, achieved scores of -5, -4, -10, and -2, respectively. All of them are simple, short statements that are blatantly hostile toward Black Americans. Evidencing elements of a color-blind space, the Imgur community rejects these patently racist remarks by downvoting them. When not couched in humor, racism on Imgur is unacceptable.

In this final example of Figure 115, there are more explicitly racist comments. Reacting to the poor grammar and writing in the Black Twitter images, Imgurian A begins by asking who wants to go to the library, and then states that he hopes most people are "trollin," or joking as they write the captions for Black Twitter posts; he hopes they are purposefully being ignorant or stupid.

He is downvoted and his comment achieves a score of -6 for this remark. He then replies to his own comment, asking why he is being downvoted; he seems to be genuinely confused as to why his first comment was not well-accepted by the community. However, instead of an explanation for why he has been downvoted, another user, Imgurian B, reinforces the primary message and replies with his own overtly racist statement. He inserts an Ebonics phrase ("da libary") and insists that black people are not "trollin," but instead are "uneducated, illiterate, and ignorant." This genuine, overtly racist comment earned him -9 downvotes, which is lower than the amount the original comment received (-6).
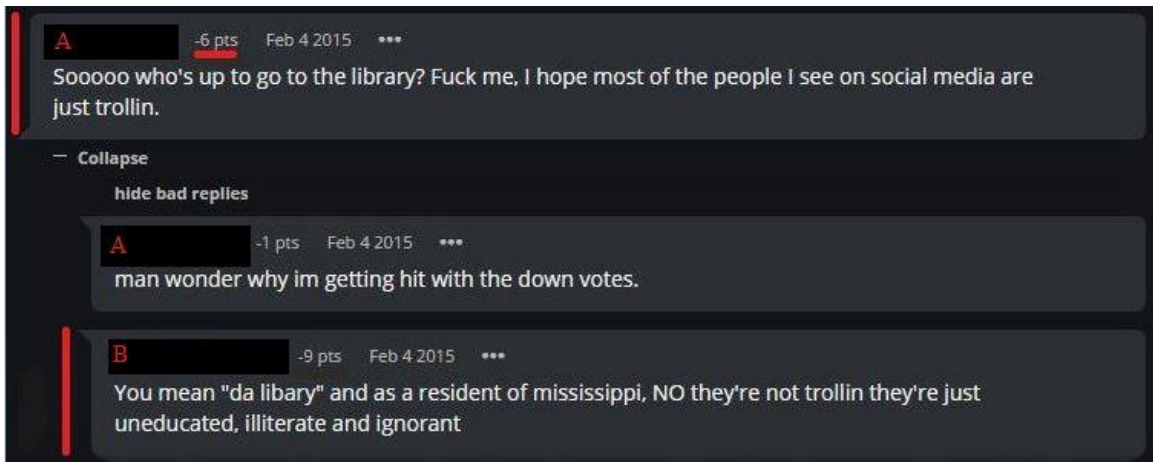
Figure 115. Overt Racism Opposed

Racist comments on Imgur are praised when couched in humorous statement of
clever wit, but they are unacceptable when seemingly more serious, genuine, or
"unfunny." The community seems to say, "No, Black Twitter is not racist, and we reject
overtly racist comments that are mean-spirited; but tell us a racist joke, and we're fine to
laugh along." The Imgurian community therefore finds itself in an ideological quandary,
resulting in a palpable, visible angst as they try to sort out which jokes are funny enough
and which ones do not measure up. There is an insecurity that many Imgurians voice: Are
we supposed to be color-blind or not? Is it racist to laugh at Black Twitter? Competing
voices give contrary answers, as seen in the following dialogues and themes.

Meta-Discourse: Shouldn't We Be Color-Blind?

Some dialogues on Imgur directly raise the question of racism and color-
blindness. In some instances, users will self-identify as black and approve of Black
Twitter on Imgur, playing the role of the "token" or "safe" black individual that serves as

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a bulwark against charges of racism, effectively insisting, "if there is a black man on our side, how can we be racist?" (Bonilla-Silva 2003). In other dialogues, users are left to sort out what they believe. As is typically the case, Imgurians make their opinion heard through voting, even when they do not reply with a comment of their own.
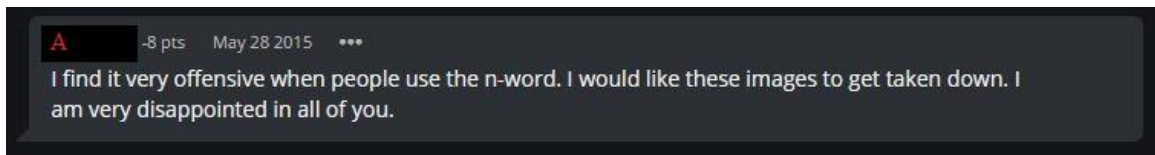
Figure 116. Are we Colorblind?
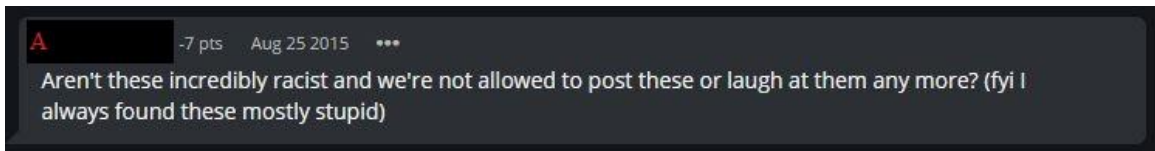
Figure 117. Are we Colorblind?

The first two examples, Figures 116 and 117, both claim that Black Twitter is racist and that it should not be allowed on Imgur. In the first, the Imgurian asks that the images be taken down, expressing that he is offended and disappointed in the community. Though no one responds to him, he does receive -8 points on his comment, indicating that the community does not agree with him.

In Figure 117, the Imgurian asks, rather than asserts, about Black Twitter images being "incredibly racist," and he wonders if "we're not allowed to post these or laugh at them anymore." The latter half of his question is quite illuminating, for the way he phrases his question indicates that he feels that something has constrained him. He asks,

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are we not *allowed* to post or laugh at these? This is the influence of a color-blind era that

decries all overtly racist statements. He feels pressure, an external influence imbibed that

has changed language and race relations such that what was previously laughed at is now

unacceptable. In short, he does not accept *any* part of Black Twitter, contrary to the

majority that accepts jokes, and so he is asking if Imgur is a color-blind space that will

decry what he finds to be offensive jokes. His comment is downvoted to a score of -7; the

community does not agree with his opinion. It appears that Imgur does not want to

acknowledge that even racial jokes go beyond what is acceptable for a color-blind space.
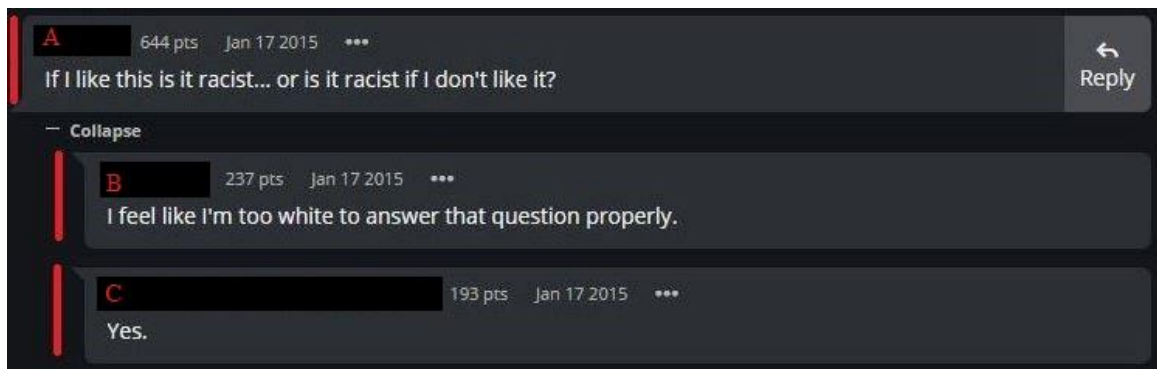
Figure 118. Are we Colorblind?

Finally, the dialogue in Figure 118 contains several Imgurians who answer a

straightforward question: if I like Black Twitter, am I racist? Or am I racist if I don't like

it? Imgurian A asks this question, and his comment receives an astounding 644 points;

many Imgurians agree with this user, or find it funny since it brings to light the

ambivalence of the racial climate on Imgur. Imgurian A is asking if it is racist to like

Black Twitter, which users believe show black norms, or if it is racist *not* to like Black

Twitter, because he would seemingly be against Black people themselves. Is it wrong to

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acknowledge race and enjoy this content, or is it wrong to acknowledge race and dislike it?

Imgur users appear to be in a bind with regards to racial realities. They feel that no matter how they respond, others may judge them as racist. In his response, Imgurian B immediately brings his own race to bear on the question: he writes, "I feel like I'm too white to answer that question properly." Imgurian C simply responds with "Yes," indicating that he perceives the racial dilemma that Imgurian A has articulated. I imagine that he throws up his hands in resignation as he writes his comment; no matter what they do, there always can be, and possibly always will be, the charge of racism leveled against them. How do white Imgurians react to such an existentially-taxing racial bind?

This brings me to the concluding section and theme as I examine Black Twitter comments on Imgur: the competing white ideologies within this digital community. Following Hughey's (2010) work on white racial identities, with reference to *inter*-racial differences I find the same themes of white victimization, Black pathologies attributed to black culture, and white debt; with reference to *intra*-racial differences I find both affective whiteness and conscious whiteness on Imgur. Imgur is a digital space in which I find competing white racial identities.

Competing White Racial Identities on Imgur

Whites construct hegemonic whiteness by delineating both the ways that non-whites are inferior to whites, and by highlighting certain white activities that fail to live up to dominant, white ideals (Hughey 2010). Below, I follow Hughey's two-fold

framework in the construction of white hegemony: *inter*-racial distinctions and *intra*-racial distinctions.

Inter-Racial Distinctions: White Victimization

Hegemonic whiteness is constructed, in part, through a perceived victimization and stigmatization of whiteness that is existentially disturbing to white people. Whites feel that the "politically correct" zeitgeist of this contemporary moment stifles their voices from being heard (Hughey 2010). They feel victimized from both the culture at large and from black people in particular. These cries of outrage are the most frequently occurring evidence of white hegemony and the construction of a white racial ideology on Imgur. Below are examples of such victimization, comments written by Imgurians who feel that they are routinely treated unfairly.
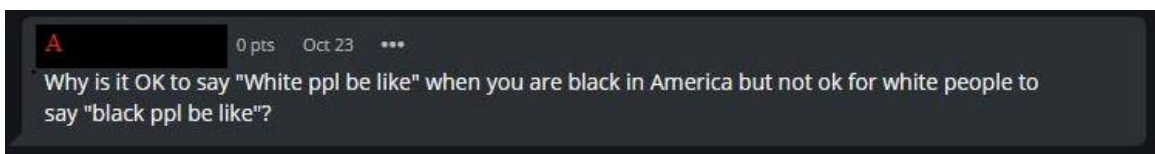
Figure 119. White Victimization
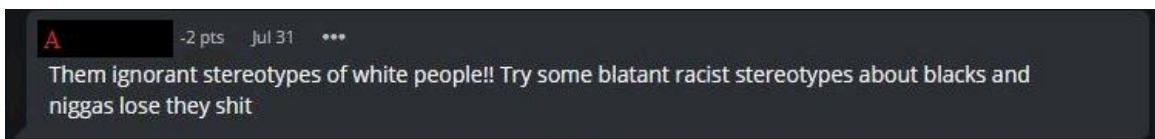
Figure 120. White Victimization

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Figure 121. White Victimization
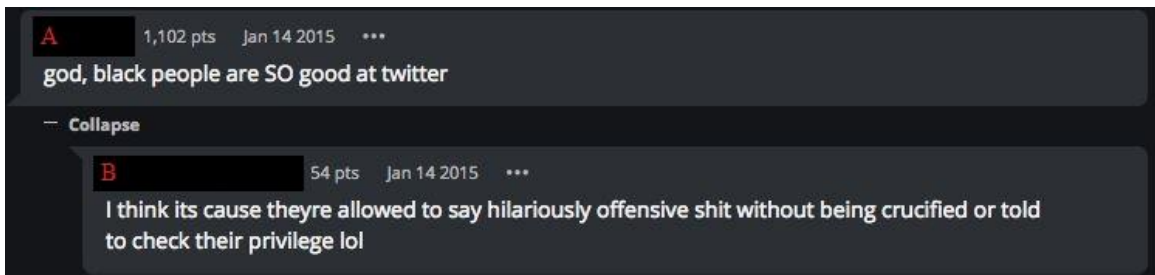
Figure 122. White Victimization
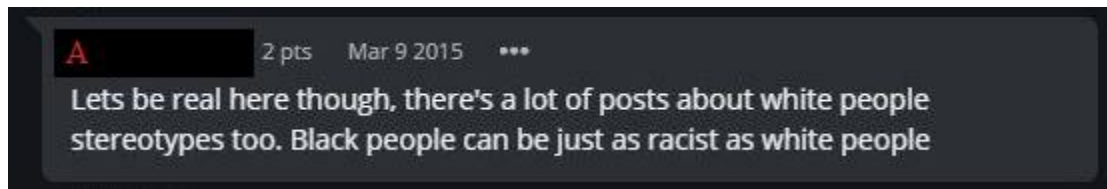
Figure 123. White Victimization

Figures 119-123 feature Imgurians voicing their frustrations over what they

perceive to be the silencing of their voices; they feel victimized and powerless because of

their race. In Figure 120, the Imgurian angrily pushes back against "ignorant" stereotypes

of white people, continuing by saying that if white people were racist about blacks, then

"niggas [would] lose they shit." In Figure 121, the Imgurian is upset because blacks can

make fun of whites, but whites cannot make fun of blacks, citing "racism" as the reason.

This is an attempt to call out the double-standard he perceives; blacks are allowed to do

an activity that is off-limits to whites. He feels victimized and oppressed.

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Likewise, in Figure 122 Imgurian B writes that black people are not necessarily

better at twitter than white people; instead, white people are not "allowed" to be offensive

with their humor or they will be "crucified or told to check their privilege." This shows

the stigma that this user expects when contemplating telling an offensive joke; according

to him, the cost of stigmatization does not outweigh the benefit of a good laugh. Note that

in Figure 122, Imgurian B receives 54 upvotes for his comment; a large number of

Imgurians *agree* with this user that white people are unfairly "crucified or told to check

their privilege."

Figure 124. White Victimization

Finally, I turn to Figure 124, in which two Imgurians are dialoguing about the "casual racism" of Black Twitter posts. Imgurian B asks for clarity on this term, and when A does not provide a definitive answer, B provides his own opinion of what kinds of racism are present in Black Twitter. While he does acknowledge that the racism against black people is more "disturbing" than that against whites, he still emphasizes the anti-white racism alongside anti-black racism, writing "The blatant anti-black racism imgur shows quite a lot, or the anti-white shown actually IN the 'Black Twitter' posts?" He points out what he sees as the *bidirectional* racism of Black Twitter: racist *comments* written by whites about blacks, and racist *images* of Black Twitter made by blacks about whites.

These sentiments expressed in Figures 119-124 show the existentially-troubling perceived victimization of white men. They feel as though Black Americans are granted freedoms that they are denied, and they buck against these alleged constraints in this digital space, voicing their angst. As Hughey (2010) writes,

> [T]he understanding of white identity as victimized by a racial double-standard justifies the actions of people of colour while simultaneously demonizing whites. This worldview is a powerful tool in the maintenance of white self-marginalization.

The sad irony is the lack of empirical evidence of true victimization and stigmatization of whiteness; the haunting consequence is that this attempted reversal of racial power dynamics places Blacks as the dominators and whites as the dominated (Hughey 2010).

This victimization is the first part of the inter-racial construction of hegemonic whiteness: whites perceive racial injustice directed against *themselves* and feel

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victimized. The second way whiteness is constructed is through identifying black

pathologies, rooting them either in biology or culture. The former is finds its home with

traditional racism, while the latter is more consonant with color-blind racism. It is the

latter, rooting Black pathologies in culture, that I find on Imgur.

Inter-Racial Distinctions: Cultural Pathologies

White rhetoric cites poor values, norms, and behaviors as leading to a Cultural

Black Pathology. Biological sources of black pathology rooted the corruption of Blacks

in black bodies themselves. Instead, color-blind racism sees cultural pathologies as the

source of blacks' troubles; but this rhetorical switch from biology to culture still reifies

distinctions between whites and blacks, causing blacks to be relegated to an inferior

status compared to whites (Hughey 2010).

Figures 125-126 show comments that root black pathology in the "black

community" and toxic "black culture." In Figure 125, the Imgurian writes that the black

community lacks values. In Figure 126 the Imgurian refers to the pathologies presented in

Black Twitter as a "set of *cultural* problems I will never suffer" (emphasis mine).

A   -5 pts   Sep 3 2015   •••
the black community lacks values, its sad
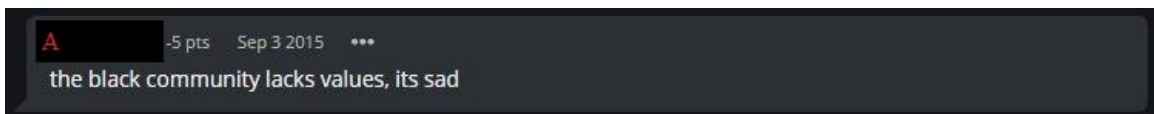
Figure 125. Cultural Black Pathologies

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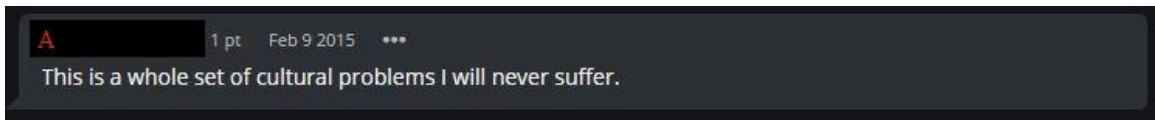
Figure 126. Cultural Black Pathologies

Likewise, in Figure 127, Imgurian A voices his frustration that black people self-perpetuate many of the issues they face, asking why they "talk about cops and stuff." He writes that when they self-perpetuate these issues, they are furthering myths and stereotypes that are not rooted in reality. This Imgurian implies that self-inflicted woes are themselves a cultural pathology that is particular to the black community.
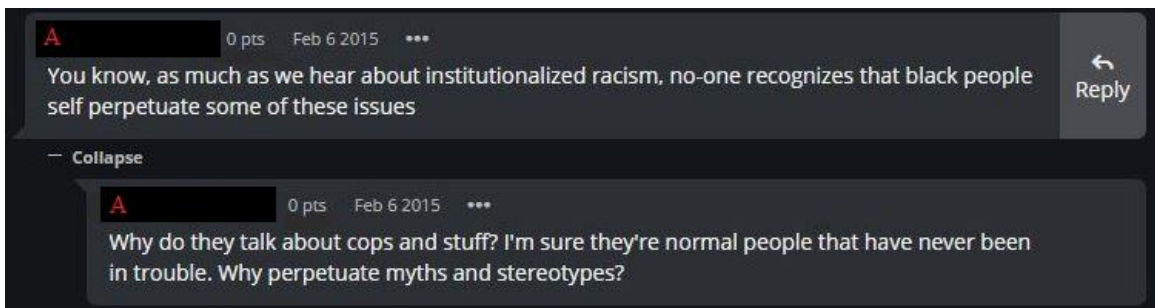
Figure 127. Cultural Black Pathologies
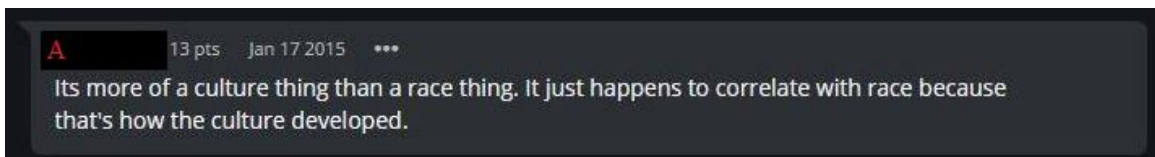
Figure 128. Cultural Black Pathologies

Finally, the Imgurian in Figure 128 writes about the two historical sources of black pathology: biology and culture. He is responding to someone who asked if it is racist to laugh at Black Twitter; this response pushes back against biological arguments,

writing that black pathology "happens to correlate with race because that's how the culture developed." In short, it is black *culture* that is pathological, rather than their race. Therefore, it is not racist to laugh at Black Twitter because it is more about their culture than their race.

While the three other comments that discuss these issues either received no upvotes or were downvoted (Figure 125 (-5); Figure 126 (1); Figure 127 (0)), Figure 128 received 13 points, indicating moderate acceptance from the Imgur community. There appears to be the expression on Imgur that black *culture*, rather than black biology, is the root of blacks' "pathologies" and troubles.

There remains one more aspect of the inter-racial construction of white hegemonic identities to observe before observing *intra*-racial distinctions: claiming "ownership or knowledge of objects and traditions symbolically coded as 'non-white'" in order to compensate for the perceived emptiness of whiteness, what Hughey calls "white debt" (2010:1299). This includes using relationships with non-white people not only *defensively*, against charges of racism, but also *offensively*, as a way to overcome the perceived general blandness and physical, emotional, and sexual impotency of whiteness.

Inter-Racial Distinctions: White Debt

This aspect of the construction of whiteness was not often seen on Imgur, but there were a few instances in which white Imgurians would claim behaviors and attitudes understood as "black" in order to reinforce their own opinions or as proof that their lives were more enriched than other whites' lives. Additionally, Imgurians would claim

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friendships or romantic relationships with Black people to overcome the understood

"dullness" of what it means to be white and to validate their opinions on racial issues.

I discussed one example of white debt earlier while analyzing the "Mocking

White People" stereotype in Black Twitter, shown again below:

yall so harsh on white ppl telling them
they dont face oppression. have u
seen what their moms make for
dinner?? thats unseasoned
oppression

1:46 am · 10 Jun 15

Figure 129. Mocking White People

In a response to this Black Twitter image, the Imgurian in Figure 130 expresses

frustration. He feels that black people are imposing an unwarranted and inaccurate

stereotype on white people.

A   190 pts   Jul 31   •••
I never got the unseasoned food shit I mean Italians are white and what about new Orleans like
fuck man half there food is seasoning.

Figure 130. Overcoming White Debt

While his comment ignores the historical construction of whiteness, disregarding

that Italians were first rejected and then later accepted as white, two things must be

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noticed about this comment: first, it is an example of an Imgurian attempting to overcome what he perceives to be an unfounded stereotype about white people, that their food is bland or unseasoned; second, that a large number of Imgurians agree with this sentiment. This comment receives 190 upvotes, placing it easily among the top comments of its post. Almost 200 other Imgurians agree that mocking white food, as in this Black Twitter post, is unfounded and offensive. Instead, they want more credit as they try to overcome this white debt, and so they push back against this common white stereotype.

Victimization, Cultural Black Pathologies, and coopting symbolically non-white traditions & objects to overcome the sense of white debt are the three main *inter*-racial distinctions that are used to construct and establish white hegemony. All three are found in Black Twitter comments on Imgur. In addition to these, there are several *intra*-racial distinctions that whites employ to demarcate an idealized or dominant whiteness from a sub-standard, coopted or weak whiteness. While Hughey (2010) identifies three strands, I only find evidence of two among Imgurians' comments: affective whiteness and conscious whiteness.

Intra-Racial Distinctions: Affective Whiteness

From the standpoint of whites who *oppose* racism, actively seek to undo injustice, and bring reparations to those who are oppressed, the idealized white racial identity is one that admits its guilt, even if complicit, in the racism of America's past, while a white racial identity that does not reach out in reconciliation is seen as stubborn and obstinate. I call this first ideology The Penitent. Conversely, from the standpoint of whites who

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oppose racial reconciliation and restitution, a white racial identity that seeks to help non-whites is weak and has been duped by non-whites. I call this second ideology The Obstinate. Both of these ideologies voice their opinions on Imgur, but neither is accepted.

The Penitent on Imgur evidence what Winant (2004) calls racial dualism. It is a division within their white identities in which, on the one hand, they benefit from white supremacy and their own whiteness in the United States but, on the other hand, they oppose racism and inequality, seeking to undo the damage that white supremacy has wrought throughout American history.

Both ideologies of whiteness, The Penitent and The Obstinate, have emotional ideals for their own construction of whiteness. The Penitent expect sorrow over racism & the seriousness of the ills of injustice to be the primary emotions of their adherents. The Obstinate expect, as their primary emotions, anger & frustration over the confines of reverse racism & the rising socio-economic status of non-whites, which they perceive as threatening. Repentance and Rage, then, are the two affective ideals of these two competing ideologies of whiteness. Each ideology has normative emotions; falling short of these expectations yields an inferior whiteness for each ideology. Each ideology makes distinctions *within their own ideology* in order to arrive at an idealized construction of whiteness. Hence, the *intra*-racial distinction of affective whiteness (Hughey 2010).

I find both of these ideologies on Imgur. In fact, many comments already examined bear the idealized emotions of these ideologies. Sorrow and repentance can be found in many comments that voice the reality of racism in America and in Black Twitter on Imgur, as seen below. In Figure 131 below, two Imgurians agree on the seriousness of

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the racism that Imgur exhibits when confronted by Black Twitter. The first user merely

says "#IgnoranceMakesMeAngry," while the second user responds by affirming the

first's sentiment. The second user goes beyond agreement when he writes specifically

what makes him upset: some Imgurians "use these memes to support their racist notions

that blacks are inferior." The racism that he sees on Imgur and in the comments frustrates

him.
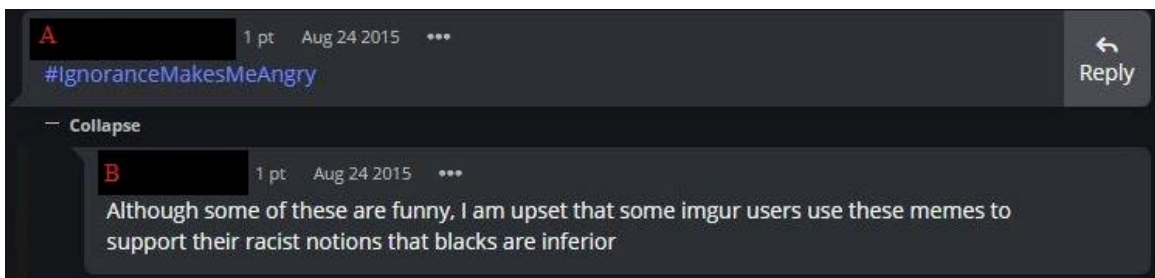
Figure 131. Affective Penitent Whiteness
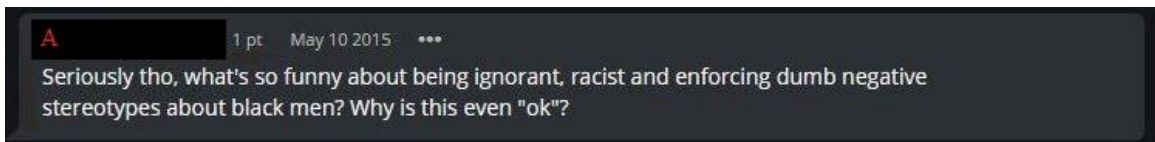
Figure 132. Affective Penitent Whiteness
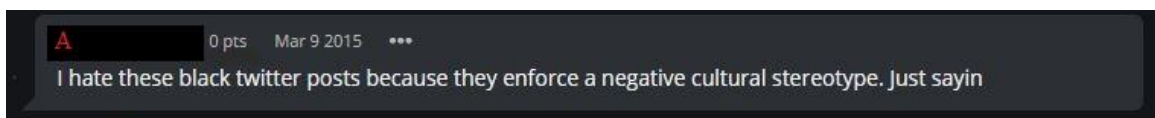
Figure 133. Affective Penitent Whiteness

In Figure 132, the Imgurian asks why it is acceptable to reify "ignorant, racist,

and…dumb negative stereotypes about black men?" He is frustrated by what he perceives

to be genuine racism. In Figure 133, the Imgurian similarly expresses irritation about Black Twitter posts because they "enforce a negative cultural stereotype." As adherents of The Penitent, these Imgurians have expressed the sadness, gravity, and importance of the racism they see on Imgur and in Black Twitter.

Anger and Frustration from members of The Obstinate can be found in many comments that voice whites' perceived victimization and stigmatization due to their white skin, as in Figure 134 below, which I previously examined in light of white victimization:
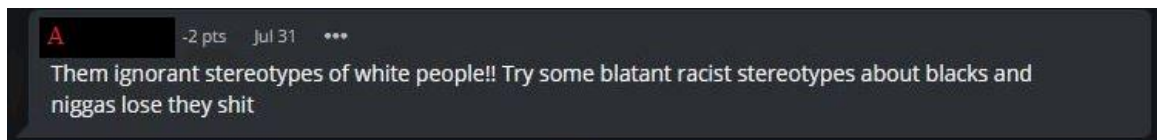
Figure 134. Affective Obstinate Whiteness

Notice this Imgurian's use of exclamation points following his first statement and his willingness to use the term "niggas" in a non-memetic fashion, instead using it genuinely as a derogatory slur. One can imagine the frustration that this Imgurian is feeling as he writes this comment.

Likewise, in Figure 135, the Imgurian explicitly cites "racism" as the reason whites cannot make fun of blacks but blacks can make fun of whites. This Imgurian is upset and expresses his anger at the reverse racism or victimization that he feels he is experiencing.
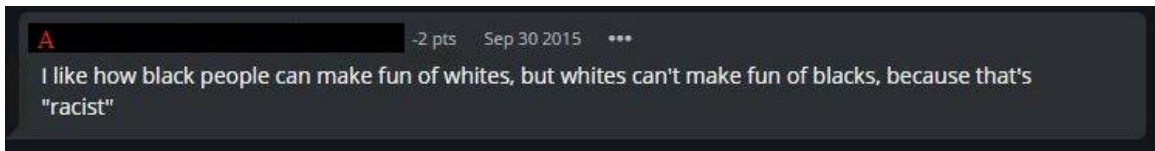
Figure 135. Affective Obstinate Whiteness
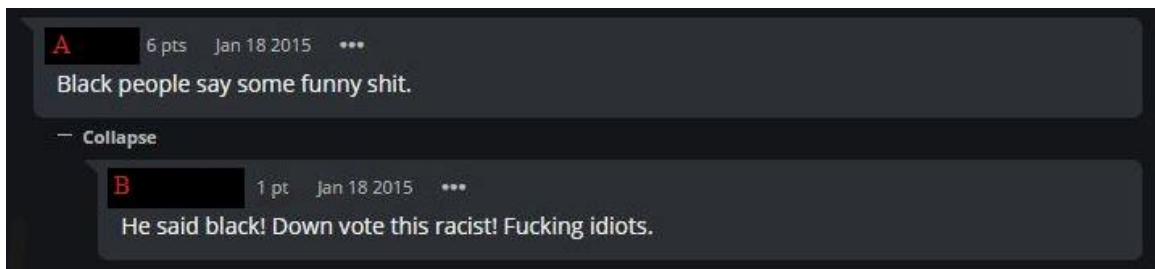
Figure 136. Affective Obstinate Whiteness

Finally, in Figure 136, Imgurian A writes a seemingly genuine comment, saying Black people are funny. Imgurian B, however, responds with an inordinate amount of satirical rage. It seems he is rebelling against those that would quickly condemn Imgurian A for writing "black." He is expressing his rage against the politically correct climate that he feels suffocates him, the contemporary color-blind era.

Therefore, on Imgur there are adherents of both The Penitent and The Obstinate. However, neither seems favored; looking at the number of votes garnered, comments from both ideologies did not achieve upvotes higher than 1 or lower than -2. This means that neither side possesses a majority presence on Imgur such that one side's opinions are wholly accepted while the other side's opinions are rejected. Imgur is a color-blind space in which clear discussions of race, when not cast as humorous, are unacceptable.

I have examined this with regards to the comments of Imgurians who voiced serious racist sentiments and racist jokes. When such statements were genuine rather than jokes, Imgurians opposed them. In the same way, comments from disciples of both The Penitent and The Obstinate are not jokes; each side is serious in its presentation of its viewpoints. The Penitent mean to point out and oppose the racism they see on Imgur; The Obstinate mean to expose and fight against the victimization they feel directed toward them as white men. Neither tells jokes, so neither is accepted on Imgur, a color-blind space that cannot bear to set aside its ideal of race-neutrality.

Intra-Racial Distinctions: Conscious Whiteness

The final concept whites use to distinguish between dominant and inferior white ideologies is the concept of conscious whiteness. There are some individuals who "see through" propaganda or "rightly perceive" what is *really* going on racially. They are racially conscious, aware of themselves and the surrounding culture. This ideal is touted from both ideological camps. But because Imgur is a public space in which The Penitent and The Obstinate interact, concerning conscious whiteness there is less arguing *within* the ideological viewpoints and more *between* them. What I find on Imgur are vying white ideologies, both attempting to claim dominance in this digital space. As Imgurians argue, they express what they consider to be the "right" white identity.

In Figure 137, Imgurian A is responding to a user that posted a gif of Denzel Washington saying, "My Nigga." Imgurian A is outraged by white people using the word

"nigga," and he expresses his anger by writing the latter half of his comment in all capital

letters.

Figure 137. Conscious Whiteness

Imgurian B responds by saying that he will stop saying "nigga" when "you guys

stop saying it," seeming to imply that he perceives Imgurian A to be black. Imgurian A

then replies that he is white, not black, so "there is no 'you guys' here." He then draws a

distinction between a "typical" white person and how he sees himself, writing, "It's

called not being your typical white racist douchebag."

Imgurian A sees himself as an enlightened white person, one who breaks away

from the mold of "typical" white people who are racist; this places him among The

Penitent. He does not see himself as racist, but rather as better than that. He expresses his

conscious whiteness as he skewers one kind of white ideology and places another on a pedestal, the group to which he expresses he belongs.

In contrast to Imgurian A in Figure 137 who expresses a conscious whiteness that leans towards The Penitent, in Figure 138 above both Imgurian A and Imgurian B express a conscious whiteness that leans towards The Obstinate. They noticed a minute detail in a Black Twitter images, the shoes that a white, female teacher was wearing, a detail that was not the focus of the image in question:

Figure 138. Conscious Whiteness

Figure 139. Conscious Whiteness

The focus of this Black Twitter image is on the black boy, as evidenced by the caption and the fact that the pictures "zooms in" on the boy in the right-half of the image. But by noticing, highlighting, and critiquing the shoes of the white woman, which are only shown in the left-hand side of the image, these Imgurians express their conscious whiteness. They have stereotyped this woman as one who "only dates colored dudes and teaches in the 'inner city.'" Leaning more towards The Obstinate, these two Imgurians find camaraderie and seem to mock the woman's assumed racial awareness and desire to reach toward others beyond her own race as she teaches in an area not typically associated with whiteness. Additionally, these two Imgurians' conscious whiteness is one that seems to denigrate interracial dating.

Likewise, in Figure 140, Imgurian B attempts to correct Imgurian A's use of the word "nigga" by writing "*the type of fella." Imgurian C then replies to B, writing "#whiteguilt." Imgurian C's response expresses that "white guilt" is causing B to censor others' speech so that they will avoid explicitly racist language.
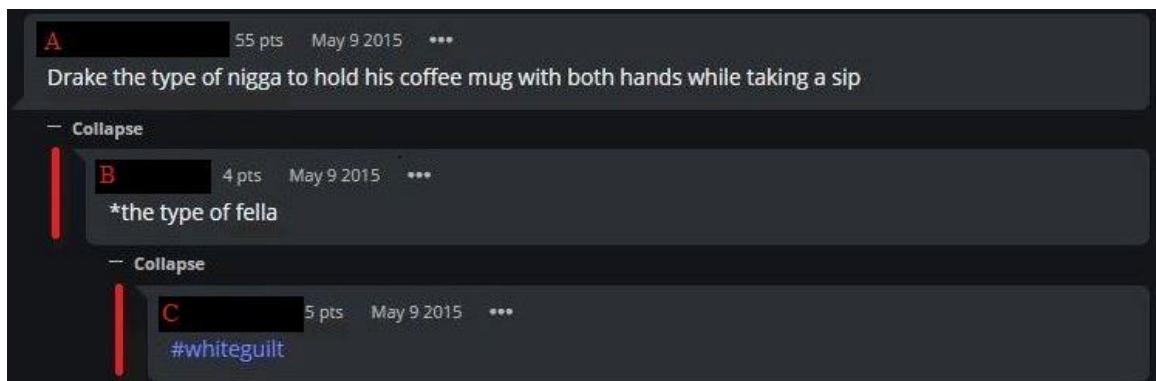
Figure 140. Conscious Whiteness

This phrase "white guilt" is used by The Obstinate, those who oppose anti-racist efforts, and the phrase implies that there is a defect of character that causes opposing white ideologies to lead to feelings of guilt when they should not. Therefore, Imgurian C leans towards The Obstinate while Imgurian B leans towards The Penitent. B strives for change and C, in turn, mocks this attempt.

Consider the number of votes on each Imgurians' comment; the low number of votes reinforces the conclusion that *neither* viewpoint commands a majority of users; in Figure 140, one comment receives four upvotes and the other receives five, though they speak out of opposing ideologies viewpoints. Imgur is a color-blind space in which serious discussions of race from either white ideological perspective are not rewarded with large numbers of upvotes.

> A   -1 pts   Oct 25 2015   •••
> Were all the "Cops hate blacks" jokes necessary? A few make a mistake and suddenly it's open season on all of them. Come on...
>
> Reply
>
> — Collapse
>
>> B   1 pt   Oct 26 2015   •••
>> Dude, it's been like that for a while now, where you been? Not saying I believe that, but a lot of people do, especially in the hood.
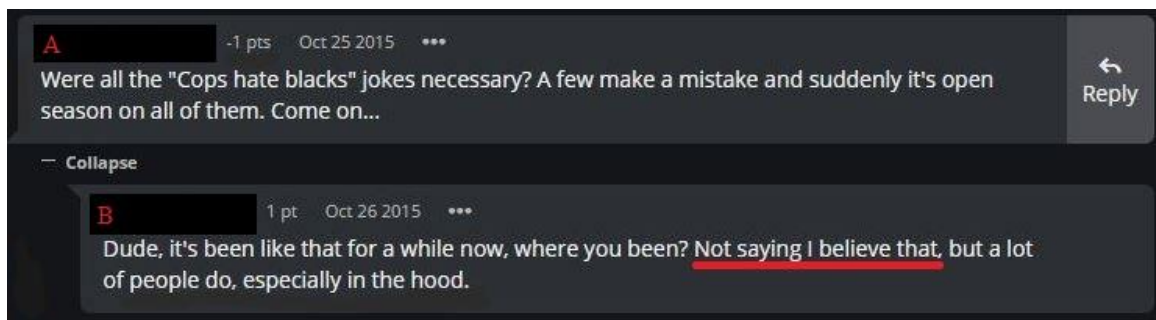
Figure 141. Conscious Whiteness

Finally, in Figure 141, there is a dialogue between two Imgurians in which Imgurian B outlines views from a particular form of whiteness but includes the caveat that he does not necessarily believe what he is describing. Imgurian A begins this dialogue by pushing back against a common stereotype presented in Black Twitter: the

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stereotype of police officers who "hate" black people. Imgurian A would rather

characterize recent police behavior as a few "mistakes," landing him among The

Obstinate. Imgurian B responds with surprise because he considers this viewpoint to be

outdated. But, as he says this, he nuances his reprimand by writing, "Not saying I believe

that…" Here, he is articulating two contrasting white viewpoints concerning racial topics.

He acknowledges the views of Imgurian A and leaves open the possibility that he might

agree with him; while presenting the viewpoint of The Penitent, Imgurian B does not

profess belief in it. In fact, he articulates what *kinds* of people may believe in this

opposing viewpoint when he writes, "but a lot of people do, especially in the hood." He is

delineating between kinds of white people that believe in these two opposing white racial

ideologies.

Competing White Racial Identities: Conclusion

Imgurians express a variety of opinions of what it means to be white and what it

means to be black. Some Imgurians reveal angst and frustration over white victimization

and the stigma they feel has become associated with white skin in contemporary

America. In keeping with color-blind racism, they look to black culture to explain black

pathologies, rather than the biological sources of traditional racism. I find on Imgur The

Penitent and The Obstinate, arguing with each other over the ideal form of whiteness and

how whites ought to act in the contemporary racial climate. Both sides express genuine

emotion for their own viewpoints; both regard their views seriously, with Repentance and

Rage reigning as the idealized emotions. But because they speak of race seriously, the

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Imgur community rejects both viewpoints, adhering to the supposed race-neutrality required of a color-blind space, as shown in the lack of upvotes or downvotes given to these viewpoints. These viewpoints are tolerated on Imgur, but neither is truly at home.

White Masculine Identities and Color-Blindness: Conclusion

Imgurians write their comments with the community at large in mind; they vie for upvotes, the currency of status that sets good comments apart from bad ones. The goal of dialogue on Imgur is humor and entertainment: these are the kinds of comments that are routinely upvoted to total scores in the hundreds and thousands. Because of this, Imgurians regularly utilize clever memetic responses to garner upvotes, and on Black Twitter posts this includes memetic Ebonics phrases.

Imgurians view women through a focused male gaze, they engage in gendered language, and they Fetishize interracial sex. Their words proliferate the racial stereotypes found in the Black Twitter images by dialoguing about how black people are poor criminals who use drugs. The users who *employ* Ebonics and the users who *oppose* Ebonics both evoke traditional racist signifiers. Meanwhile, serious discussion of race is not accepted by the community, but instead remains on the fringes. Here, The Penitent and The Obstinate join with likeminded individuals as they correct whoever they consider to be wayward wanderers, those who they see as stumbling from their path of ideal whiteness.

To close, I turn to the conclusion of my analysis of the images and comments of Black Twitter on Imgur.

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CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Many questions cannot be answered from the data and analyses presented here. Since I did not contact or communicate with any users directly, their psychological state of mind or motives remain, by and large, unknown. Furthermore, I am unaware if Imgurians know about Black Twitter on Twitter, or if they visit Twitter at all. Perhaps, in response to the images they see on Imgur, they leave Imgur in order to view, troll, or engage with Black Twitter on Twitter. Additionally, little is known about the individuals who create Black Twitter albums and upload them to Imgur, including how and why they gather the images that they do. These and other questions must be answered by future research. However, below is what I can conclude from my research.

Interaction on Imgur is, first and foremost, governed by the potentialities laden in the interface design of the website. Imgur prioritizes well-received *content* over *comments*, even though the comments are a vital component for determining the Imgur community's ethos and values. Comments have limited capabilities and the default sorting of comments is by the most upvotes and the least downvotes; noncontroversial comments are normative. Comments that receive more negative votes than positive votes are hidden at the bottom of the post or comment chain, further limiting the community's exposure to controversial opinions. Through this interface decision to hide "bad" comments, the Imgur community rewards and accepts opinions that are popular. The

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majority viewpoint will always have an advantage in raw numbers over controversial or minority viewpoints. Therefore, Imgur's voting system rewards the reproduction of dominant ideologies; what is popular becomes hegemonic.

Because the upvote is the coveted currency of status, individuals strive to receive them through clever, witty comments that invoke memetic phrases, both those related and unrelated to racial issues. They write memetic phrases because they have perceived the relevant group norms and attempt to act within those norms, wanting to be counted among the Imgurians, as part of the Imgur community. Humorous or memetic comments are the only forms in which it is acceptable to discuss race; serious discussions of race go unrewarded on Imgur. Comments that breach the topic of race genuinely and respectfully may receive a small amount of upvotes, but if they are overtly racist the community will reject them. Harshly racist comments are downvoted to a negative score.

The images of Black Twitter on Imgur reproduce the dominant iconic ghetto stereotypes. In these images, I find the general cultural stereotypes that African Americans are poor, uneducated, violent, and use drugs; the stereotype of the hypersexual black male brute; and the stereotype of the sexually licentious and loose black female. Imgurians view these images for comedic relief, as entertainment during times of leisure. This is one reason Imgurians truncate any serious discussions about racial inequality and reject comments that attempt to resist the racist images and stereotypes contained in Black Twitter. Black Twitter on Imgur is not serious; it is entertainment.

In my research, I see a space on Twitter, called Black Twitter, wherein a community mostly comprised of African Americans freely voices the pains and

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frustrations of being black in America, the hope for potential change, and the joy of camaraderie. This is juxtaposed with a phenomenon of the same name on a different social media platform, Imgur, with different affordances offered to its users, who mostly are white men. On Imgur, the dominant social hierarchies are reified through the content posted and comments written. Social media platforms do not appear as guaranteers of democracy and equality, but instead as specified, nuanced, and diverse, leading to opportunities for liberation in some digital spaces and the reproduction of inequalities in others.

Furthermore, in the male-dominated space of Imgur, the individuals turn their gaze toward females whenever they self-identify as females, making sexual advances toward them and fetishizing interracial sex. Notably, though many Black Twitter images contained the stereotype of the black hypersexual male, there was no outcry or resistance in the comments with regard to the perceived threat of black men to white women. Instead, black men are prized for their sexuality more than ridiculed or viewed with disgust.

But Imgur is not a space that prizes interracial interactions beyond explicitly sexual ones. The Obstinate voice white victimization and attempt to overcome the stereotypical blandness of whiteness in general and white sexuality in particular. They feel stigmatized, confined, and constrained in this color-blind, politically correct era. In contrast to The Obstinate, The Penitent lament the horrors wrought by racism in the United States, expressing sorrow as they show guilt and remorse over what they perceive to be the racism of Black Twitter on Imgur. Whether they voice victimization or valiancy,

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The Obstinate and The Penitent are neither accepted nor rejected by the Imgur community; the majority tolerates their opinions, but does not reward them.

Imgur is, therefore, a color-blind space in which serious discussions of race are anathema. The community instead prizes comedy, levity, and entertainment. Ebonics holds a central place as memetic phrases are used to garner upvotes, and anti-Ebonics ideologies, while present, are tolerated when not *too* offensive. There is, therefore, a bind that constricts Imgurians. Some feel that Black Twitter is racist, yet others perceive it as good fun. They use Ebonics, including "nigga," though they admit to never using this language in "real life." They permit lighthearted anti-Ebonics ideologies, but not when they become overtly racist; overt racism is detestable in a color-blind space, and so those comments are downvoted and unacceptable. Even as Imgurians dance along this racial line, not knowing whether to fully embrace the racist messages in Black Twitter or reject them for full-scale color-blindness, they also use this space to share how they feel stigmatized or sorrowful as various groups delineate between unacceptable and acceptable white ideologies. Race matters to these users, and they voice their opinions in this digital space.

Imgur is a color-blind space that is not likely to devolve or become a new alt-right space. Though some Imgurians voice opinions consonant with such ideological viewpoints, the interface of the website keeps the majority in control: white men that feel bound to color-blindness, rejecting outright racism, tolerating racial discussions, and applauding racist jokes. This is the confused, conflicted, constricted space of Imgurians in Black Twitter posts on www.Imgur.com.

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APPENDIX A

SELECT TABLES

Table 4. Total Album Views
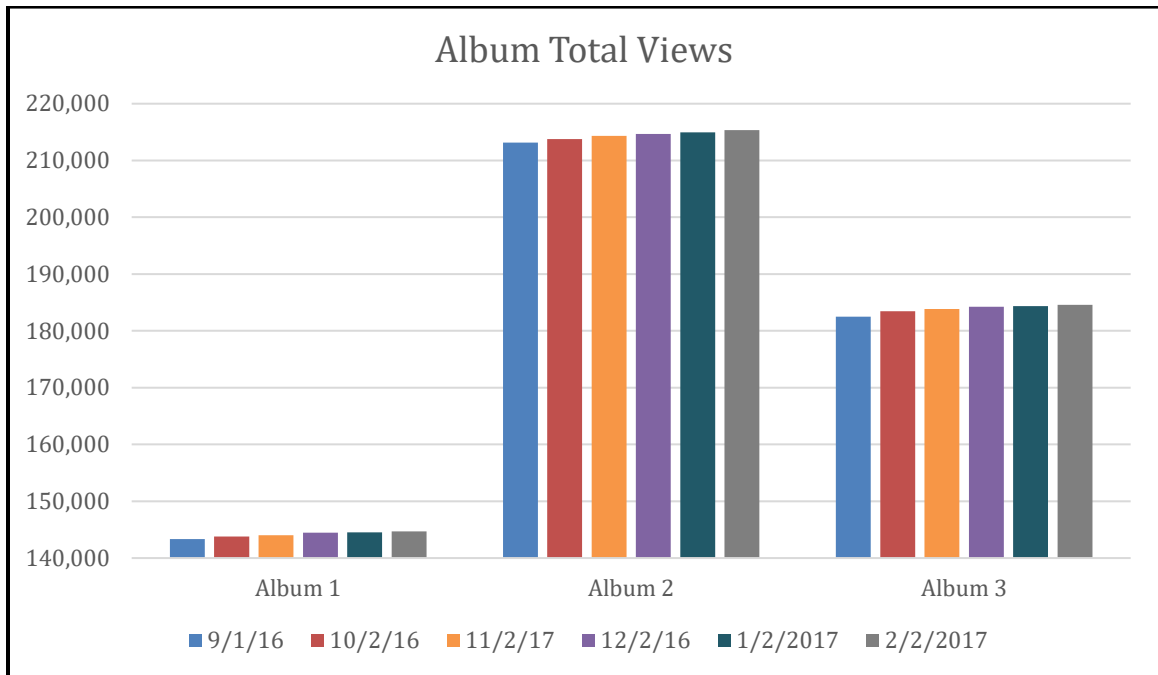
Note the y-axis of Table 4 does not begin at zero; I have begun the y-axis at a higher value so that the variation within each album, though minimal, might be more easily seen. From September 2016 to February 2017, Table 4 shows there was an increase in views for:

- Album 1, from 143,322 to 144,709, a difference of 1,387 (a 0.97% increase);

- Album 2, from 213,139 to 215,361, a difference of 2,222 (a 1.04% increase);

- Album 3, from 182,493 to 184,579, a difference of 2,086 (a 1.14% increase).

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Table 5. Total Cumulative Album Votes
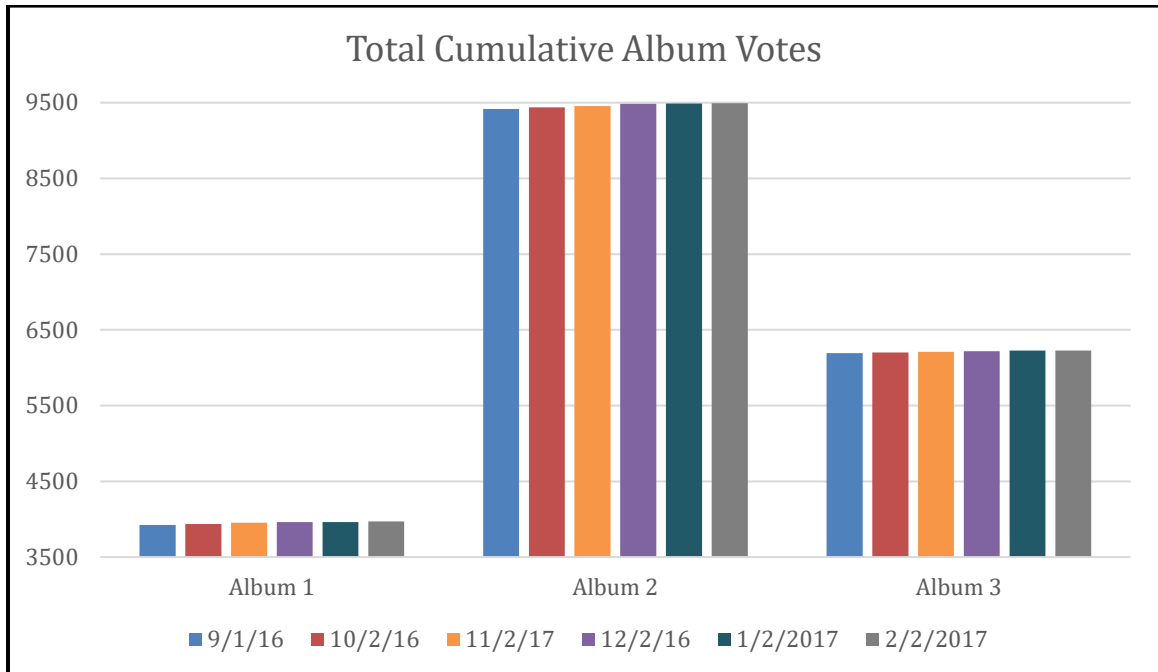

Note the y-axis of Table 5 does not begin at zero; I have begun the y-axis at a higher value so that the variation within each album, though minimal, might be more easily seen. From September 2016 to February 2017, Table 5 shows there was an increase in total votes for:

- Album 1, from 3,922 to 3,971, a difference of 49 (a 1.25% increase);

- Album 2, from 9,418 to 9,492, a difference of 74 (a 0.79% increase);

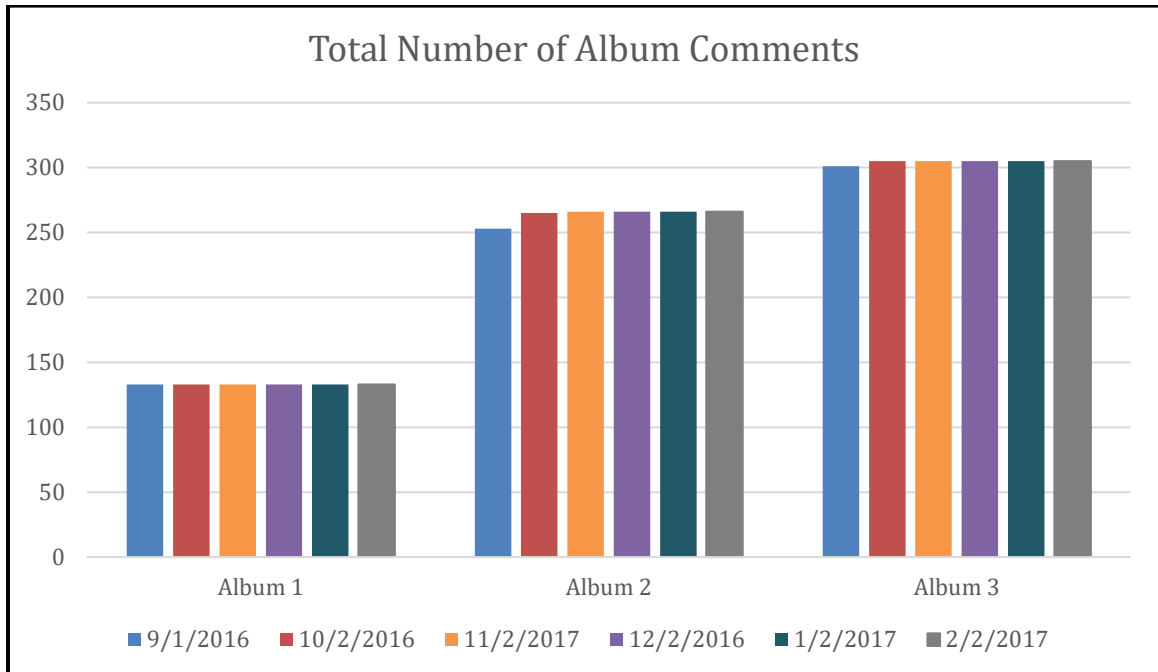- Album 3, from 6,193 to 6,229, a difference of 36 (a 0.58% increase).

Table 6. Total Number of Album Comments

Note the y-axis of Table 6 does not begin at zero; I have begun the y-axis at a higher value so that the variation within each album, though minimal, might be more easily seen. From September 2016 to February 2017, Table 6 shows there was no increase in comments for:

- Album 1, which remained at 133 comments,

while there was an increase for:

- Album 2, from 253 to 266, a difference of 13 (a 5.13% increase);

- Album 3, from 301 to 305, a difference of 4 (a 1.33% increase).
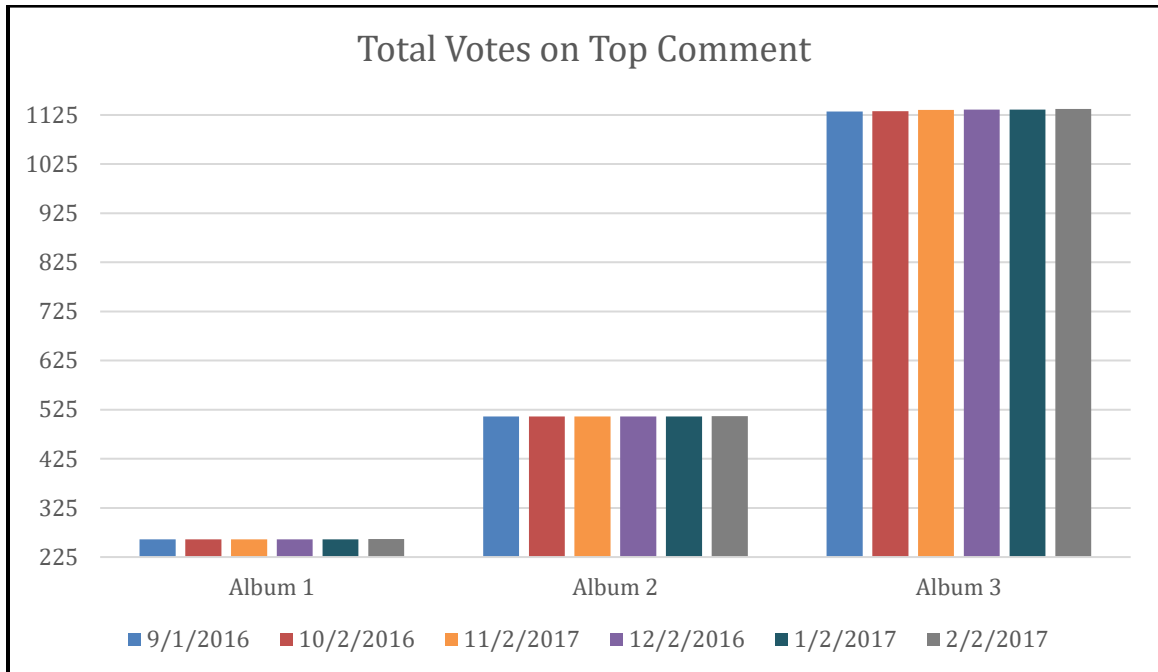
Table 7. Total Votes on Top Comment

Note the y-axis of Table 7 does not begin at zero; I have begun the y-axis at a higher value so that the variation within each album, though minimal, might be more easily seen. From September 2016 to February 2017, Table 7 shows there was an increase in the votes on the top comment for:

- Album 1, from 261 to 262, a difference of 1 (a 0.38% increase);

- Album 2, from 511 to 512, a difference of 1 (a 0.20% increase);

- Album 3, from 1,132 to 1,137, a difference of 5 (a 0.44% increase).

Table 8. Minor Category Code Allotments

Total Codes Allotted: *Minor* Categories

Category	Value
Blacks: Lazy	4
Blacks: Violent	6
Blacks: Drunkards	7
Blacks: Glutinous	5
Blacks: Poor	16
Blacks: Uneducated	31
Blacks: Value Low Culture	36
Blacks: Drug Use & Knowledge	23
Blacks: Use Ebonics	45
Blacks: Mock Other Races	36
Blacks: Mock White People	31
Blacks: Criminals	11
Black Men Violent	17
Black Men Hypersexual	72
Black Men Disinterested Romantically	28
Black Men Absent Father	21
Black Men Emasculated	2
Black Women: Domineering	16
Black Women: Promiscuous	33
Black Women Avaricious	4

Table 9. Major Category Code Allotments

Total Codes Allotted: **Major** Categories

Category	Value
Cultural Racism Total	251
Black Men Total	140
Black Women Total	53
White Twitter vs. Black Twitter	43
Types: Black Comedian & Slave	67
Political Turned Entertainment	14
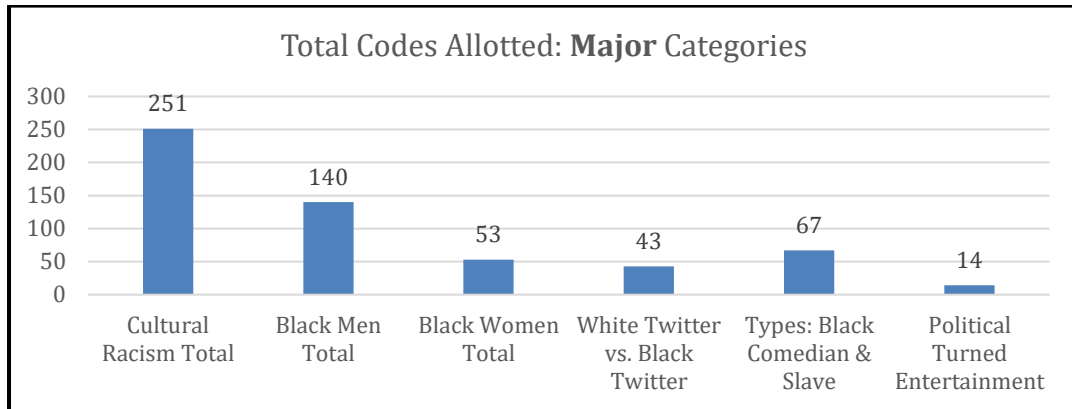
Due to low frequency co-occurrences (n<20%), the following categories have

been excluded from Table 10: the Cultural Racism minor categories of Lazy, Violent,

Drunkards, Glutinous; Mocking Other Races & Mocking White People (which only co-

occurred with each other, yet at a rate above 90%); the Black Men minor category of

Emasculated; the Black Women minor category of Avaricious; and the category of Type:

Slave. The chart is read in the following way: the theme in the first column has a high

frequency co-occurrence (n>20%) with the theme(s) in the third column. The second

column contains the total codes allotted per minor theme (italicized and left-margin

oriented) and per major theme (bolded and center-oriented).

Table 10. Total Codes Allotted, & Cooccurring Codes

Major Themes *Minor Themes*	**Total Codes Allotted**	Codes allotted to Other Categories (High Frequency Cooccurrences Only)
Cultural Racism	**151**	
Poor	*16*	Uneducated (4)
Uneducated	*31*	Ebonics (6)
Value Low Culture	*36*	Comedian (22)
Drug Use and Knowledge	*23*	Value Low Culture (4) Ebonics (6) Comedian (15)
Use Ebonics	*45*	Comedian (10)
Black Men	**138**	
Violent	*17*	Black Men Hypersexual (5)
Hypersexual	*72*	Black Men Disinterested Romantically (17) White Twitter vs. Black Twitter (20)
Disinterested Romantically	*28*	Black Men Hypersexual (17)
Absent Father	*21*	Uneducated (4)
Black Women	**49**	
Domineering	*16*	Black Men Disinterested Romantically (4) Black Women Promiscuous (10)
Promiscuous	*33*	Black Women Domineering (10)
White Twitter vs. Black Twitter	**43**	Black Men Hypersexual (20)
Type: Comedian	**60**	Value Low Culture (22) Drug Use & Knowledge (15) Ebonics (10)
Total Codes Allotted	**441**	